

Hegel's God

A Counterfeit Double?


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WILLIAM DESMOND

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WILLIAM DESMOND
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium

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*To the memory of
Ludwig Heyde*

‘O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space,
were it not that I have bad dreams.’

Hamlet, II,ii, 258–60

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Preface

This book is an *adieu* to Hegel. I would never have written it without the invitation to contribute to the series in which it appears, and particularly the invitation of Carlos Steel, one of its general editors. I have written a number of books on Hegel in which religion figures importantly, and I thought I did not want to say much more on Hegel. But a number of considerations led me to accept the invitation. Most proximately was friendship. Then there was the fact that I was, and am, working on a book on God in which the dialectical way of thinking is one of the important approaches, but in that book I could only refer to Hegel in a more general way. The invitation would allow more amplitude to give an account of Hegel and define more fully a response. There was also the fact of an ever-increasing distance between my own thought and Hegel as I understood him. This book would allow, I thought, some reckoning with, or different accounting of that distance.

Then there was also the misgiving – at times a kind of dismay even at Hegel’s power to infatuate religiously gullible admirers – growing on me over many years, that there was something not at all right about what Hegel offers us as ‘God’. Hegel offers what looks like one of the most impressive philosophies of religion in the history of philosophy and yet the more I studied it, and the general philosophy it expresses and reflects, the more incredible I found it as a philosophy of *God*. I emphasize this. My uneasiness was not simply due to increased study and understanding of Hegel, though I have not ceased to read and teach Hegel over the years. It was primarily with respect to the matter itself. The more I thought about God, what were the ways to God, what God might be, and the more I understood what was at issue in the question of God, the more I became convinced that Hegel’s way was not the way to go. On the surface Hegel’s thinking saturates us with God, but what it saturates us with, I have come to think, is a ‘God’ who is not God. This book is an attempt to account for such a claim. An idol is no less an idol for being wrought from thought and concepts as from stone or gold or mud.

This will be too blunt for some, and perhaps a preface should be more coaxing. To allay alarm, I assure the reader that some of the intricacies of the matter itself, in Hegel, and otherwise, will shortly occupy us. I stress: my misgivings about Hegel come proximately not from misgivings about Hegel, but from thought about God, and then from unhappy thought about what Hegel says about God. One must be willing to think about God, first and foremost. So I would be amiss if I did not offer this hermeneutical remark, being partly a plea, partly an anticipatory exculpation, partly a worried directive on my overall intent. I ask the philological guardians – I speak with affection – to be patient and not to crack down prematurely. I have paid their law all due respect in more than a quarter of a century reading and thinking about Hegel, up and down, in and out, about and about going, and I honor those

who do that too. I do not quite do that here. I am trying to see something, and say it, and not just in the repetition of Hegel's words. There is something recessive, or not said, or garbled in the saying, or strategically soft-pedalled in Hegel. So I have double vision reading him. I see him and see something other, and that something other seen exacts a fidelity more basic than to him. If the effect may seem cross-eyed to some, so be it. We must read, yes, but we must think about what is seen, and what is other to the said.

Think on the analogy of looking at a painting: stand too close, and you might see nothing, though you see many details; stand too distant, and you see a large outline, but perhaps not well what the whole lines out. The right point of vision is somewhere between too near and too far. I have spent more than twenty-five years trying to find that spot in relation to Hegel. But there is a further vision beyond this. Having seen Hegel from that spot, I do not speak just from that spot, for I have taken other steps from that spot and so I see differently. What I intend is not a supplement to Hegel, since the step away from Hegel is not supplementary while leaving the original project intact. No amount of philosophical supplementation will turn 'God' into God. We only deck the idol with further distinctions.

The step away is the *adieu*. But, of course, *adieu* can be diversely spoken. Sometimes we come back to what we leave. Sometimes we leave, knowing that if we ever come back, it will be to a stranger. But *adieu* is, more than anything else, a blessing. Can you bless an idol, and not be idolatrous? Not easily. Even so, it is asked of us to try to do Hegel justice. We must try to see as he did; but we may have to see otherwise to do the matter justice, and this is the more absolute fidelity. This is not to subscribe to the Kantian hermeneutics, now more radicalized in postmodern thinking, that we can understand another better than he did himself. We must see, as best we can, with the eyes of Hegel, if we are to understand him; but if we take the other step, we cannot rest content with that. What we see then gives us double vision, and while this might seem like squinting to some, it may be more lucid looking, and not just at Hegel, but at the matter itself. To accept this second responsibility and fidelity with respect to the question of God might discomfit the philological police – I speak with affection – but not to accept (speaking not coaxingly enough) would be a philosophical sin.

My warm thanks to my student Daniel Murphy for his great help with the notes and references. Thanks also to Renée Ryan, Daniel Murphy, Miles Smit, and Jason Howard for help with proof-reading and the index. To my family, Maria, William óg, Hugh and Oisín, I owe more than I can acknowledge, not least the gift of their constancy. I am sure that the quiet gifts of my father, Eugene, and my late mother Hannah, communicated more to me than I can tell of the constancy of the divine.

I dedicate the book with a different *adieu*. The book is dedicated to the memory of Ludwig Heyde, scholar, philosopher and friend. He was a fine Hegel scholar, and Hegel was his constant companion in thinking of God and religion since the Enlightenment. He was a rare companion to have in wrestling with misgivings about Hegel's God or 'God': I mean as much passionate about God, as about Hegel. I would wish him here to take me to task for my apostasy to Hegel's 'God'. But – who knows? – perhaps he would approve. For there is an *adieu* on the boundary of life and death, and it is an *adieu* to which Hegel's 'God' could never answer.

By Way of Introduction: Hegel's God, Transcendence and the Counterfeit Double

A Figure of Dialectical Equivocity

While Hegel is not taken with the same seriousness in Anglo-American philosophy as in Continental thought, he is widely regarded as one of the major thinkers of the modern era, if not the entire philosophical tradition. Like many philosophers until more recently, he devoted significant attention to questions bearing on God. But unlike many modern philosophers, he claimed to take the specific characteristics of Christianity into account in his philosophizing, though this does not mean he paid no attention to other religions. Still, he made strong and startling claims about the inherent affinity between his own philosophy and what he asserted came to fullest disclosure in the Christian religion.

There are certain striking ironies here. A philosopher who proposes majestic ambitions for philosophical reason has been seen also as contributing to the opposite effect: the self-deconstruction of philosophical reason. A philosopher who places religion, with art and philosophy, at the highest standpoint of the absolute, has been seen as a major influence on modern atheism, in its left-Hegelian line that passed through thinkers like Feuerbach and Marx. Hegel himself was undoubtedly more complex and ambiguous than many of the successors who form part of his legacy. That complex ambiguity merits close attention. Moreover, Hegel set himself apart from a trend evident in his own time, and not unknown now: philosophizing about religion, but without seriously speaking about God. For him, different forms of religion are inseparable from different understandings of the divine. We cannot avoid speaking about God.

For these and other reasons, an exposition, interpretation and critical engagement with Hegel's philosophy of religion generally, and his concept of God more particularly, is important. I want to explore the distinctive stresses of Hegel's approach to God, what marks its attraction for some, and what I take to be its fundamental problems. I do not offer a complete exegesis of Hegel – a daunting task in itself. There are many excellent studies of Hegel's philosophy of religion, though perhaps fewer on the idea of God.¹ Exegesis is not my primary aim, though there will and must be some. Nor do I want to mimic Hegel, with a little pop-up critique in the last chapter. I want to address, sometimes more directly, sometimes less, what I take to be the central issue around which Hegel orbited: transcendence.

This may seem strange in that 'transcendence' is not an Hegelian word, and if Hegel stood for anything, it was a philosophy of immanence. Yet Hegel was deeply engaged with the human being as marked by self-transcendence, and most manifestly in being religious. This engagement is not separable from a sustained criticism and rejection of a God who is 'beyond'. This, for him, is a problem or source of problems rather than any answer. Hegel's answer is a speculative philosophy of immanence. The relation of human self-transcendence and God as transcendence that is *other* to human self-transcendence provides a central consideration shaping that result, and around which Hegel formed and reformed his understanding of God. This reformation is at work throughout Hegel's writings.

My question will be: what is the rationale of this reformation? What is the justification? Does the reformation not only risk, but enact, a deformation of divine transcendence as other? If we decline, or deny, or reconfigure a robust sense of divine transcendence as other to our human self-transcendence, do we attenuate the idea of God, producing a 'God' that is not God? We are made to pause, certainly, if we reflect on the idea of God inherited from the great monotheistic traditions. God is God, and only God is God; God is not finite creation or nature; God is not humanity, nor history; and this 'not' signals a qualitative difference that does not obviate the possibility of communication *between* the God who is God, and these created others, natural and human; but the communication is not a matter of 'overcoming' the difference in a dialectical-speculative whole. Does Hegel so attenuate this God, that his new 'God' must be defended with the utmost of dialectical-speculative ingenuity? Is Hegel's speculative-dialectic of God marked by a dialectical equivocity: a dialectic that claims to answer equivocities in the relation, say, between God and humans, or religion and philosophy, only to hide *new equivocation* in its purported answer? Is the God who is God just the Whole of wholes, as Hegel seems to suggest, or a God beyond any whole? What considerations persuade Hegel to hold to a God of the whole, and dissuade him from any other God beyond? Does Hegel persuade us?

I want to engage Hegel primarily with respect to the issue itself. The reader will come to know more fully that I am not persuaded. It is too early to say why, but what I see in Hegel is not quite an evasion of divine transcendence as other, but rather a reconfiguration of its meaning such that its ultimacy is relativized. Hegel enacts a *project* in reconstructing God, in constructing his 'God', a project deriving from religious sources, but also diverging from them in a decisive reconfiguration of divine transcendence. Does the reconfiguration amount to the production of a philosophical surrogate for the God of religious transcendence? Is this 'God' a counterfeit double of God?

Transcendences

To make sense of the question, now initially, and with an eye to later discussion, we need to distinguish at least these three kinds of transcendence, roughly corresponding to the other-being of nature, of the human self, and of the divine. I will use the shorthand T1, T2, T3. What is important is not only their character but their interrelation. I want to offer some discriminations necessary for our entire

exploration, but if the reader finds this prematurely complex, let him skip ahead, and then come back to it, when more fortified for these metaphysical considerations.

T1: Here I refer to the transcendence of external beings as other in nature: their transcendence is in their not being the product of our thinking, or doing, even while related to thinking and doing. This their otherness as *being at all* gives rise to the wonder: what makes possible both their possibility and actuality? What makes possible the possibility of their being at all? This is the metaphysical question: Why beings and not nothing? The possibility of a transcendence as other to their transcendence is raised by such a question. This is a major source of perplexity about God as the origin of being. I would say that there is something *hyperbolic* about the being given to be of beings: not what they are, but that they are at all. Hyperbolic in that the astonishment aroused by this givenness of being is not a determinate question seeking a determinate answer, but something exceeding determinate thinking. An approach to God via this hyperbole of being suggests a source not reducible to being in the sense of the whole of finite beings. I cannot say more here, but the significance of this will recur, since this metaphysical astonishment before the givenness of being at all does not figure importantly in Hegel's philosophy.

T2: Here I refer to the transcendence of *self-being* such as we meet especially in the self-surpassing power of the human being. The meaning of possibility can here be defined immanently rather than just determined externally. There is possibility as freedom, perhaps even as the promise of free finite creativity. Human self-transcendence awakens to itself in the astonishing givenness of being, awakens to its own astonishing powers of self-surpassing. Human beings are finite yet exceed finitude, in their self-surpassing. Hence the further question: In relation to first transcendence (T1), is this self-transcendence just an overreaching into emptiness, or a self-surpassing towards a further transcendence as other to us? Think, for instance, this second transcendence in relation to human 'creativity'. Are we creations of an other origin? Or self-creating, hence our own origins? Or does our self-transcendence, even if 'creative', refer beyond itself to a more original source of creation, an origin trans-human, and trans-natural, in not being identical with humans, or the whole of finite beings in nature? The question of God as other arises in connection with the possibility or impossibility of constituting ourselves as absolutely self-determining wholes. Our ambition to be such wholes is hyperbolic in its own way, but is there a more ultimate source of being, more originary and whole, than any purported self-completion humanity could possibly claim for itself? A crucial question for Hegel, and to be put to Hegel.

T3: Here I refer to original transcendence as still *other* to the above two senses. What might this be? Can we speak of *transcendence itself*? Rather than the exterior transcendence or the interior, can we speak of the *superior*? How superior? Transcendence itself would be in excess of determinate beings, as their original ground; it would be in excess of our self-transcendence, as its most ultimate possibilizing source. It would be beyond the ordinary doublet of possibility/reality, as their possibilizing source; it could not be just a possibility, nor indeed a determinate realization of possibility. It would have to be 'real' possibilizing power, more original and other than finite possibility and realization. It would have to be possibilizing beyond determinate possibility, and 'real' beyond all determinate realization. Could we describe it entirely in terms derived from what we know of self-determination?

But if we are self-determining, we are finitely self-determining, and everything about our perplexity here points to something other again. Asking what would such third transcendence be, we find ourselves again in perplexity about God.

Hegel, as I said, does not use this language of transcendence, for reasons which will appear, but he is concerned with the ultimate ground and possibilizing source of being and thought, and will give names to this like the Idea, or *Geist* or the absolute, or God. He tends to think of this in entirely *holistic* terms: this ultimate and absolute source of possibilizing will be absolute freedom, which for him means absolute self-determining being. What will be evident in Hegel, I think, is an understanding of what I call T3 in terms of a certain concept of T2. He will stress a self-transcendence in which there is a *relating* to the other, but in that relating to the other, a *fuller self-relating* comes to be. The issue of transcendence as other (T3) is reformulated in terms of a self-completing of self-transcendence: transcendence from self to other to self again, and hence there is no ultimate transcendence as other, only self-completing immanence. I anticipate: Hegel's God is beyond any dualism of objective and subjective in terms of an absolute subjectivity that includes in its immanence the relation of subject and object, such that even divine intersubjectivity is, in the end, a relation between God and itself.

Such claims will make more sense, and certain qualifications will be made, as we proceed, but a relevant point for understanding Hegel is this: third transcendence (T3) has been made problematic in modernity, both by a univocalizing objectification of first transcendence (T1), and by developments of second transcendence (T2), especially when this last defines itself in terms of its own autonomy. Then a logic of *self-determination* insinuates itself into all our thinking, including our thinking of what is other to our self-determination. Inevitably, third transcendence (T3) becomes endowed with an equivocal position. Indeed, there is here not only a tension but a certain antinomy between autonomy and transcendence. This is not just a mere contradiction, but marks an equivocal space deep with tension and confronting us with different basic options. How think the two together, when something about each seems to strain against the other? In this equivocal space, the traditional respect accorded to third transcendence (T3) from an essentially religious perspective comes under onslaught in modernity. Into that space of equivocality, our powers of self-determination are inserted, as somehow answering the tension of autonomy and transcendence.

How formulate this antinomy? The ideal of autonomy emphasizes our determining power; it may grant our relatedness to others, yet the primary stress is on self-determining, the *nomos* of the *auto*. By contrast, transcendence must stress the importance of some otherness; the *trans* is a going beyond or across towards what is *not* now oneself. If God is third transcendence, there is an otherness not reducible to our self-determining. This transcendence cannot coexist with an absolutized autonomy which is absolutely for itself. This is the antinomy: if autonomy is absolute, third transcendence has to be relativized; if third transcendence is absolute, autonomy must be relativized. Western modernity has generally been drawn in different ways towards the first alternative, with momentous repercussions in relation to transcendence as other, in relation to God.

It is not that the exigence of transcendence withers. To the contrary, human autonomy tends to assume for itself the energies of transcendence. The human

being will make a claim as an *immanent* transcending power. This is its being as self-surpassing (T2). In this we seem to surpass the antinomy, since here we have both autonomy and immanent transcendence. We seem to have no need for an *other* transcendence. Hegel, I propose, seeks a dialectical-speculative solution to the antinomy of autonomy and transcendence. There is no absolute transcendence as other. If we must speak of transcendence at all, this must be relativized by paying heed to the language of a God who enters time, and hence abrogates its own transcendence. God, as much as humanity, it will be said, is given over to immanence. Indeed, this immanence is itself the very process of both God's and humanity's self-becoming. Autonomy is reformulated in such a dialectical-speculative manner that it can come to include within its own processes of self-determination all references to transcendence as other. The absolute as self-determination relativizes all relations to transcendence as other, by including them within its own self-completing absoluteness.

In this light, Hegel is the epitome of the privilege given to self-determination in modernity, representing its dialectical-speculative consummation. The absolute form of being is dialectically self-determining. The absolute is self-determining being. This absolute is identified with the free self-realization of reason itself, which becomes itself fully by overcoming the indefiniteness of the beginning, becomes completely self-mediating and self-fulfilled. Hegel addressed the dedivinization of nature as other (T1), sought in humanity's self-determination (T2) a new wholeness of being, and affirmed autonomous immanence by means of a dialectical-speculative overcoming of all 'objective' beyonds (T3). But there are equivocalities in his speculative dialectic, regarding both self-determination and the relation to otherness, equivocalities signalled by the fact that Hegel's claim to the completion of self-determining being is almost simultaneously followed by a *dialectical reversal* of that completion.

I mean that while Hegel absolutizes the claim of self-determining reason, his successors relativize reason, even while not entirely abandoning self-determination. Hegel seems to make absolute claims about his 'God'; his successors will debunk such claims. Why do we so swing between inflation and deflation? Because there is something *more* than our self-transcendence, known in the intimacy of our own immanent power, and bringing back a restless perplexity about a transcendence more than our own, and remaining dark despite reason's claims to self-determination. We become perplexed by our power, and less assured of its absolute autonomy. It seems to issue from an origin more enigmatic than itself. And so we ask: Does autonomy as self-transcendence open into, open up out of, a transcendence beyond autonomy? Does some sense of transcendence as other (T3) return? But how interpret it? Perplexity about God does not end.

This perplexity does not end even when this other transcendence (T3) is given an *atheistic* interpretation, for instance, in Schopenhauer's Will. If Hegel's thought thinking itself is the high noon of modern rational self-determination, Schopenhauer's Will represents a downward turn into the shadows of a darker origin. It is remarkable that Hegel's *Science of Logic* was composed almost *contemporaneously* to Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*. Hegel's apotheosis of ascendent reason is shadowed by its dark twin, embodied in Schopenhauer's descent into a darkness prior to reason. Can the ascent of one be divorced from the descent

of the other? Do we still live out of the consequences of that ascent and descent? Thought thinking itself greets its reversal in thought thinking what is *other* to thought itself. But what is this other? And what of God?

This is the matter itself, and would require a more extended exploration than can be undertaken here.² Relative to Hegel, we find what I call an erotic absolute.³ Hegel rejects an 'objectivized' beyond, for an immanent self-surpassing process of self-determination. We have a 'God' that has to *become itself*, determining itself in a process which begins in a kind of lacking indefiniteness that is overcome just in its self-becoming, a self-becoming fulfilled in the end that is the complete self-determination of what is merely implicit in the beginning. An erotic absolute is one modelled on a certain understanding of self-transcending being (T2): one that surpasses an initial indefiniteness, that others itself, determines itself as other to its initial indefiniteness, but comes to itself again more fully, by relating explicitly to itself in that otherness.

Hegel's 'God', or *Geist*, or Idea is a bright rational version of the erotic absolute. Schopenhauer's Will is a blind, insatiable striving, a dark version of the erotic absolute. In many of Hegel's successors, and against his apotheosis of reason, the erotics of being often takes the form of *eros turannos*.⁴ Schopenhauer parades as an 'atheist', and not unlike some of the dissident post-Kantians, he is contemptuous of the moral God. Nevertheless, he has his 'God', though this 'God' looks more like Descartes's evil genius than any benevolent providence. Hegel too had his 'atheist' side, detected by Kierkegaard, enacted by Feuerbach and Marx and others. Query: Is the rational dream of the idealistic 'God' not only powerless against, but conducive to bringing forth these other monsters? We make our home in holistic immanence, and then there is an eruption of a dark transcendence *in* human self-transcendence, hinting at a more unfathomable darkness that is other to human self-transcendence. We bewitch ourselves with 'announcements' of our now being 'beyond' the old God. But being so beyond, the 'beyond', or counterfeits of it, does not cease to stump us.

The great monotheistic traditions have spoken of God as beyond humanity and beyond nature, and have made a variety of claims of revelation from this divine source, as well as calling attention to a variety of mediating links between the immanent world and this transcendent source. No doubt, in modernity there has been widespread opposition to this view of God, as much in Hegel, as in Nietzsche, and in other currents of thought. Yet some sense of transcendence as other to human self-transcendence and nature as a totality of finite beings is essentially entailed by this monotheistic God. Without some irreducible sense of divine transcendence, one wonders about inevitable equivocation on what we mean by God. I do not deny that extremely complex considerations need to be addressed in order to make intelligible sense of what such a God might mean. But this is a task we should take up, not consent from the outset to the withering of transcendence as other. Otherwise, we risk dissimulation, compounded by the temptation to offer substitute 'Gods' in the place of that withering.

I will argue that Hegel gives us a counterfeit double of God, to the extent that divine transcendence as other is rendered speculatively redundant in his vision of 'God'. The word 'God' may be frequently on his lips, but what the word means hides a hollowness with respect to this irreducible transcendence. The hollowness

is indulged by his religious admirers when they look to Hegel for succour in a godless world. The hollowness is exploited for cruder deconstructions by his anti-religious students when they look to him for a logic, a speculative-historical ABC, to further the self-apotheosis of secular man. The counter to Hegel is not just to say this, but to rethink the entire perplexity, and not just with the presuppositions or terms that Hegel brings to bear on it. Again, this fuller rethinking cannot be our task here. This is to track some of the intricate paths of thought Hegel followed and made up, to the end of that redundancy and new speculative 'God'.

The reader should not jump to the conclusion that when terms like 'transcendence as other', or more metaphorically, 'beyond', are used, we must be victims of an 'objectification' of the divine. Hegel, among others, rejects this objectification in favor of self-determining immanence. But he seems also to think that *any* 'beyond' falls prey to something like this objectification, and hence *every* version of transcendence as other (T3) must be reformulated to avoid this. The result is that finally Hegel is deficient when it comes to a non-objectifying 'beyond', as indeed a non-subjectifying 'beyond'. We need finesse beyond that objectification, or subjectification, but also beyond his speculative dialectic.

I would speak of divine transcendence as overdeterminate, not indeterminate. In excess of the determinacies of things and our self-determining, this transcendence (T3) could not be defined as a merely *indefinite beyond* to finite being. If it were, its relation to and participation in the immanent world would be feeble. Third transcendence is not an empty indefinite but overdetermined in a surplus sense: God as hyperbolic. And the hyperboles of finite being, in creation, and in human being, are signs of the ultimate communication between it and the finite whole. If this is so, God could not be comprehended under any finite category of the possible or real. It would be above, *hyper*, *über* them, and yet be the original power to be at its most ultimate. What must this possibilizing power be, such as to give rise to finite being as *other* to itself, and hence as possibilizing the finite space, or middle, for first and second transcendence? Such divine transcendence could not be identified with any projection onto some ultimate other of the first two transcendences (T1, T2). There could be no objectification (T1) or subjectification (T2) of third transcendence (T3). Rather second transcendence (T2), in its ineradicable recalcitrance to complete objectification, would be pointed beyond objectness and subjectness to transobjective and transsubjective transcendence (T3). Nor is first transcendence (T1) devoid of ambiguous signs. We live in an ambiguous intermediate world whose signs have to be discerned with finesse. But divine transcendence as other could never be compromised in all this. Hegel's 'God', as the Whole of wholes, is not it.

To begin a book with these considerations is perhaps too hard, but it is best to jump in at the deep end, and if necessary swim to shallower waters. In truth, there is nothing but deep water when we come to God. The question of God, for the philosopher as well as for the religious person, concerns our discrimination of the false doubles of God, that is, idols. No one escapes the need for finesse to tell the difference here.

The Question of the Counterfeit Double

The above considerations about transcendence have repercussions extending in every direction, for instance, the ethos of our thinking about God, the proper protocols of that thinking and the status of its claims, the nature of prayer and worship, the nature of God, the nature of creation, the nature of good and evil, the nature of God's immanence in time, the nature of religious community. Our discussion cannot be merely piecemeal, and it will address all these concerns. But before outlining the issues at stake, and the plan of this book in the next section, I first need to say something about the question of the counterfeit double.

There seems something ineradicably plurivocal about being religious. It resists reduction to one univocal meaning, and seems marked by a certain constitutive ambiguity. There is a doubleness to this: on the one hand, we might see this as a defect of thought to be overcome by a more rational approach; on the other hand, we might see it as something affirmative, in reminding us of the ultimate enigma of the divine, and the impossibility for humans to be completely on a par conceptually with God. One of the tasks of being philosophical is certainly the cultivation of mindful discernment of this ambiguity. But how? That is the question. Hegel's own resort to the *Begriff* in relation to the *Vorstellung* represents one way. We will occupy ourselves more fully with this, but my point concerns philosophy's relation to religion as the original sphere of significance to be understood, through which the sense of God is more originally mediated.

Monotheistic religions offer an image of God as the absolute original; philosophy claims to reflect on the truth, or untruth, of this. Philosophy's discernment must be attentive to what is shown, or not shown, in and through the religious image, and also to claims made about God as the absolute original. Religion may play false. Philosophy may also play false, if it fails to do justice to both the religious image and the original it claims to reveal. How to tread these very slippery slopes? Every way we turn a demand to *be true* is being made of us: being true in being religious, being true in being philosophical, being true to religion in being true philosophically. Everywhere the danger is that images of the original will be constructed that play false as well as prove true.

The difficulty is raised to the utmost when we consider the diffidence we must show in making claims about the absolute original, Godself. God is God, and nothing but God is God, and nothing finite is to usurp that absolutely unique Absolute. The first commandment is the most terrifying and the most demanding: Most terrifying, for our nature seems to be to secrete idols, and hence to betray the first commandment, even though we think we keep it. Most demanding, since it asks the ultimate in discernment of us relative to the counterfeit doubles of God, the secretion of which seems to happen to us, as if we lived our lives sleepwalking our way to the altars of idols.

Suppose we need, cannot but need, images to speak of God as original. (This does not exclude the need of concepts, nor that images may be informed by concepts. An idol, as I suggested before, is not any the less an idol because it is made of concepts rather than wood or gold.) The problem of the counterfeit double is that the image will mimic as well as show the original, and mimic by presenting itself as the original. Sometimes it may seem so like the original, we have difficulty

telling it is an image. If such an image, so to say, usurps the original, how can we tell this, since it looks the same as the original? Consider a figure interestingly mentioned by Hegel, echoing Boehme (*PhG*, 538, *PS*, 468; *LPR*, 431, 435): Lucifer. Lucifer is the bearer of light, first son of the morn, but he is also the figure of evil. But is it not just light that we seek? What then could an *evil light* be, how tell a light as evil? How could light counterfeit light? An extraordinarily difficult question, since we must also presuppose light to distinguish true light from counterfeit.

Suppose being religious is situated in an ultimate relation *between* ourselves and God. This is the first middle. But we can construct a *second middle* in the given middle. Suppose the second middle is a crystal palace – with a bow to Dostoevski. Then the images in the second middle may well be false doubles, say, doublings of ourselves and the circuit of self-transcendence clogged with itself. We traverse the middle space but now as only the medium of our own immanent transcending. What then can we claim as the true original in this second middle? A religious person will still claim the original as God; atheism will say there is no divine original; postmodern thought will say there is no original at all. Are we then in the midst of images of nothing – except ourselves perhaps? Do we come to the ultimate double: either God or nothing; religious trust or nihilism? But how discriminate the difference of this ultimate double, since all our efforts seem to circulate in the images of the second middle?

Even in this equivocal middle, the monotheistic religions enjoin absolute trust in the absolute God. Despite all difficulties of discernment, for monotheistic religions some sense of transcendence as other (T3) is *finally not negotiable*. How then would the issue of the counterfeit double look? Think of it this way. A counterfeit double is an image that is almost exactly like the original, but something has been altered that vitiates its claim to be true. I have a counterfeit banknote. It looks good, but there is something missing, or something added that is not quite right. A true note, with genuine reserves to back it up, has, say, a line of silver running from below upwards, and this vertical thread can only be seen when it is held up to the light. But when I hold the counterfeit to the light, I do not see the vertical line, but, say, the water mark of a circle closed on itself. If I do not hold it to the light, I will not see, even suspect, the absence of the vertical line. More complexly yet: What if there is a banknote that mimics the vertical line, though the foregrounded line is backed by the water mark of a circle closed on itself? How then identify a counterfeit? And what is *the light* up to which I hold each?

Close discernment is needed, and more and more so, the *better* the counterfeit. The better a counterfeit, the more it is *true* to the original. Its *achieved falsity* is dependent on its *being true to the original*. This is a very paradoxical situation: *perfected falsity is a function of being true to what is not false*. The perfect counterfeit looks almost exactly like the true currency. But somehow (and much of the difficulty lies in this little word 'somehow') the claim it makes, or the authority it claims, is not to be sustained. It may even be that the falsity of the counterfeit is that it is *too perfect* (a thought that sometimes worries us about Hegel's system).⁵ Of course, much hangs on whether there is any original to which reference can be made to sustain the claim to be true, or false. If there is no original, there is no counterfeit; there is not even an image, since any image, without an original, images nothing, hence is no image. If this were so, there would be no question of

truth, and no question of discernment. There would be no question of *being true*, in the many senses this can have.⁶

But this cannot be true. For every denial of truth happens *within* the exigence to be true. This exigence is not something we first determine or construct, but it determines us to be the kinds of beings we are. Every truth we claim to 'construct' happens within this exigence we do not construct. Otherwise, in the present instance, we destroy the difference between an idol and God. But this destruction of difference is itself idolatry, and so reinstates, by enactment, what it claims to destroy. If every image were self-authenticating, then there would be no authentication in which differences of better and worse have a grounding. It will amount to 'say-so'. It is because I say it is. Everything is 'made up', but when everything is 'made up', we cannot even speak of something being 'made up'.

The question then: Do we need an *original as other* to sustain the claim made by an image to be a genuine image? A genuine image not simply of itself? For then it would be only a self-referring image, a self-reflexive image, a self-creating original, or (as Nietzsche claimed for the world) a work of art giving birth to itself. Is it surprising that the exclusion of God as the other original leads to the self-divinization of immanent finitude as its own self-original? But where do we get that sense of the original as other? And how do we discern claims that this or that is the original, since every such claim seems itself open to the suspicion of being a counterfeit double? And what if the original can never be identified with this or that, or even the totality of this, that and the other? In such an equivocal situation, is there any finesse that will help? Where would that finesse come from?

There is no easy answer. The religious image itself, even if it is genuine, is here also tested by this perplexity of the counterfeit double. I know anti-religious thought will point the finger at religion as itself counterfeiting human being. Apart altogether from the justice of this finger point, religious thought cannot just point the finger back at its antagonist, but must put the question to itself, most especially, if its vocation is to cooperate in keeping unblocked the ultimate porosity between the human and the divine. Keeping open that porosity is to be in attendance at the communication of the divine and the human, and thus to enact a vigilance to the insinuation of the idol or the counterfeit double.

What then of Hegel? I have already suggested worries about his apotheosis of self-determining being, and his dialectical-speculative relativization of absolute claims made on behalf of God's transcendence. We will have to proceed further. One cannot just say that Hegel's God is a counterfeit double, as if, by contrast, and without further ado, one knew the original. But also one cannot judge Hegel just in terms of the immanent coherence of his claims. His speculative reconfiguration of divine transcendence (T3) may have been effected with just this in view: the closed circle of immanence at home with itself.

Rather, one must have dwelled in the ambiguous plurivocity of being religious, enacted philosophical reflection about the ultimate astonishments and perplexities there occasioned, strained one's soul to the utmost to remain true to the God that is God and that may be shown, or not shown, ambiguously or not, in this milieu of finite being. While internal instabilities and even incoherences in Hegel are not unimportant, there is something more important – fidelity to the 'matter itself' (*die Sache selbst*); fidelity that is enacted in thought that seeks to be true to the fullness

of what the 'matter itself' shows. Hegel, I think, mixes something of this openness with a way of thinking that reconfigures what is being communicated, leading ultimately to its being recast in a form that closes this openness to the ultimate transcendence of the divine, and the hyperboles of finite being that are the reminders of God communicated to us in the between. The full substance of my claim here is not adequately intelligible outside of the rethinking of God that I hope to offer in *God and the Between*.

An Outline

I have not yet said much about the specifics of Hegel, though I have said much that will have specific bearing on Hegel. It will help to anticipate what is to come. The different chapters of this book deal with the issues, and the wide-ranging repercussions of the thought of transcendence, stated briefly above at the beginning of the last section.

In Chapter 1, I will look at Hegel's early efforts to find an immanent way, negotiating between different commissions and omissions signalled by Enlightenment, Greece and Christianity. I want to look at Hegel's engagement with Kant and his movement beyond this, both with reference to the then prevalent nostalgia for Greece, and the younger Hegel's attitudes to Christianity. We find an early hostile stance to transcendence as other, and efforts to interpret Enlightenment, Greece and Christianity in terms of freedom, individual and social, as autonomously self-determining.

In Chapter 2, I will deal more extensively with the relation of religion and philosophy. My concern will be with the role of religion in shaping the distinctive character of Hegelian philosophizing. Here I must explain how Hegel conceives of philosophy's claim to absoluteness in tandem with the same claim made on behalf of religion. I will also address the knotted relation of philosophical concept (*Begriff*) and the religious representation (*Vorstellung*), and how one redoubles, faithfully or not, the other.

In Chapter 3, I will consider what is at stake in Hegel's speculative concept of God. I will explain Hegel's critique of dyadic reflection or double thinking, and his case for a triadic relation in thinking, a triadic relation that is yet a unitary self-relation. This will form the basis for his speculative reformulation of the trinity. In this and subsequent chapters the reconfiguration and immanent appropriation of transcendence as other (T3) will be shown to be at work throughout the whole of Hegel's thinking. Hegel claims to move beyond double thinking, but does he create his own double think?

In Chapter 4, I turn to this with reference to his understanding of God as trinity. I will explore his inclusive trinitarian doctrine that overreaches the difference of the immanent self-mediation of the trinity, understood as eternal being for itself, and its externalization in creation and history, through which Hegel's God mediates with itself, and more concretely becomes itself completely. How justified is Hegel in claiming this to be the conceptual counterpart to the trinity?

Hegel's trinitarian self-relating God has meaning beyond the immanent eternal life of the divine, and so in Chapter 5, I look at Hegel's view of creation. Creation is

not, so to say, radically 'outside' the trinitarian self-relation of the Hegelian divinity, even though Hegel mimics fundamental moves we find in more traditional theological contexts. A genuine understanding of the notion of creation, I think, is inseparable from a robust sense of the absolute uniqueness of the divine act of bringing being to be. Hence it is of cardinal importance in reflection on the meaning of transcendence as other, as well as the acknowledgement of asymmetrical relations between the absolute origin and the finite creation that comes to be. These subtleties are blurred, if not erased, in Hegel's account. Is there real creation in Hegel, or the self-creation of God? What kind of absolute would such a self-creating or self-becoming God be? What is the rationale and justification of such a God? Can Hegel do justice to creation as the origination of the finite other as genuinely other to God?

In Chapter 6, I turn to Hegel's concern with history, itself continuous with his inclusive trinitarian view of the self-determining God. Time is the medium of the concrete self-determination of God. The historical self-becoming of humanity is the medium of God's coming to self-consciousness: God's own full self-knowing, and hence God's own self-redemption. We will consider how Hegel's theodicy deals with the enigma of evil. Hegel's speculative use of the death and resurrection of Christ will be noted. Hegel gives an account of the dialectical *necessity* of evil. Not just that man is redeemed by God, but God redeems himself through man, and hence man is necessary for God's own self-redemption. But what kind of God could this be, and what intimate involvement with the happening of evil is necessitated if this God has to atone, not just for man, but for itself, for Godself? The self-redemption of this God is unthinkable without Hegel's speculative reconfiguration of transcendence as other, and hence also helps us raise the question about it, as well as the elision of the God beyond the whole.

In Chapter 7, I look at Hegel's view of spirit or *Geist*, for him the highest understanding of the absolute, and the consummation of his trinitarian speculation. Hegel stresses the immanence of the spirit in the religious community. Among important questions here is this: Is Hegel's understanding of community adequate to an irreducible sense of the other – community as the being together of genuine others in ultimate relation? How holy is this spirit? Is Hegel's spirit too equivocal between the divine spirit and the human, between what he names as absolute spirit and objective spirit? Is it too equivocal between, as I would put it, the religious community of agapeic service and the political community of erotic sovereignty, the first serving transcendent good, the second enabling immanent excellence?²⁸ If so, and given the speculative elision of transcendence as other and its historical inclusion in holistic immanence, does it prove itself too hospitable by far to the anthropological reductions that were quickly to follow in the wake of Hegel himself?

In Chapter 8, I conclude with a consideration of what I call the reserves of God, which occasion reservations about Hegel's 'God' that Hegel cannot quieten. In this and other chapters the question of the counterfeit double will be present, but here I will formulate some of the deep equivocalities implicit in Hegel's putative reconciliation of philosophy and religion. Some of the questions Hegel claims solved are, seen from another perspective, either dissolved, or stifled. Despite Hegel's stated intention to 'preserve' religion, does he rather sign its remote death warrant – a warrant summarily executed by Hegel's less sophisticated successors?

Do we need to rethink the issue of divine transcendence? Is Hegel as much a victim as a defender of certainly typically modern ideas about the final incompatibility of divine transcendence and human freedom, relative to which transcendence as other to us must finally be overcome or sacrificed? Is Hegel's philosophical God a genuine match for the God of religion, or a counterfeit double of God?

Overall, I will be concerned to give a concise exposition of the essential components of Hegel's view of God, interpret and clarify some of its complexities and ambiguities, and philosophically engage some of these key ambiguities, with reference to their import for our continuing efforts to think philosophically about God. Hegel's philosophical system claims to think the whole, and God as the Whole of wholes. We must look at the interplay of sameness and difference, unity and otherness, oneness and community, that forms the basis of his system, making us ask about the systematic underplaying and reconceptualizing of God's otherness. How Hegel thinks of the One and the double is evident all along the line, be it in relation to religious representation, the unhappy consciousness, evil, and the nature of forgiveness, the death of God, and the reconciling community (spirit), to his version of a trinitarian Godself as a self-doubling One revealing a triadic, inclusive self-relating.

Was Hegel Pious?

But we should draw this introduction, too thick with transcendences, to a more human conclusion, with a glance at Hegel the Man, and with this question on our lips: But was he pious? A difficult question to answer, a cheeky query to put. Cheeky, because it will be said that this has no 'objective' philosophical importance. Difficult, since Hegel was an enigmatic thinker, and often masked as a human being. Let me cite the following portrait by Terry Pinkard, his recent biographer,⁹ for it puts the Man before us:

Those who met Hegel in his adult life tended to have one of two impressions of him. Some saw him as reserved, even stuffy, a bit arrogant, very quick to stand on his dignity, and a bit wooden in temperament. Hegel also had a detached, sarcastic side to his personality; he was not so much ironic about things (he seems to have had little irony about himself), but he was quick to see the pretensions and even absurdities in human action, although typically that sarcasm was focused on others and not on whatever absurdities there might have been in his own conduct. Some found his acerbity and sarcasm appealing, but others just found it odious. Some confused it with cynicism, some found it tiresome; Hegel clearly felt it belonged with his philosophical understanding that any more rational and philosophical way of living always and essentially brings with it stresses and strains to which one must become reconciled. Friedrich von Savigny, the conservative jurist at Berlin and one of Hegel's most dedicated opponents, for example, complained about Hegel's 'droll reconciling worldly wisdom' that would appear, 'when the talk concerns the unpleasant events and arrangements of recent and most recent times.' But just as many others saw him as honest, straightforward, down to earth, ready for a joke, affable, and quite gregarious ... If Hegel liked to combine oppositions in his philosophy, he apparently enjoyed doing so in his life as well. [Pinkard 2000, 452–3]

Pinkard's biographical narrative is excellently straightforward, beginning with Hegel's home and home town, the influence of his family and early friends, the intoxications of the young man and his friends with the bewitchments of the new age they seemed to see dawning with the French Revolution, the trials and tribulations of Hegel seeking his place in the sun, in this instance, seeking an academic job, and then of course, the interim of being an *academicus interruptus* when he took a job, first as a newspaper editor in Bamberg, then as a headmaster in a gymnasium in Nuremberg, and then the final arrival at the summit of achievement, *professor ordinarius*, first at Heidelberg, and last of all at Berlin, where his star mounted the firmament.

In between, on the more intimate side, there was friendship, deeper with Hölderlin than with Schelling, whose early soaring made the slower Hegel look like an owl to an eagle. There was love, first illicit in the bourgeois sense with his landlady at Jena, and an awkward son to show for it, then licit in the bourgeois sense with Marie von Tucher, and a healthy family life to crown his successful career. There was madness too, first of Hölderlin the friend, then of Christine, the sister, with Hegel steady and unswerving in his philosophical ambitions from early to late. And there was the constant refrain in Hegel's letters during the interruptions of his academic career which amounted to the plea: When, oh! when will I get the professorship I deserve! When this elevation did come, aspects of his character more latent and recessive earlier, due to anxieties, became more dominant as he grew more secure in himself, and Hegel became more domineering, even to his friends. One of his closest acquaintances complained about his 'tyrannical' side. Hegel's

own very typical self-assuredness about the rightness of his cause made him more and more imperious and domineering, even to his friends ... Varnhagen von Ense, in fact, sadly recalled Hegel's comportment in his last couple of years as being 'wholly absolutistic,' how in meetings of the board of the *Jahrbucher* he was becoming 'more difficult and more tyrannical' as time went on. In his outbursts, he would dress down even good friends as if they were children being scolded, something everyone concerned found both embarrassing and painful to behold. [Pinkard 2000, 624–5]

Hegel was an anxious man but also one who had a need not only to be right, but the need to *know* that he was right. His philosophical desire for the unity of truth and self-certainty, as in the *Phenomenology*, betrays this quite revealingly. With the unity of truth and self-certainty on one's side, what can stand against one, perhaps not even the gates of Hell? Indeed what *dare* stand against one? And yet the old anxiety kept recurring, and he was never able to bury the worry that the course of history might not quite confirm his views. One keeps watching the weather, and knows logically that this is the sunny hour of our modern self-determination, but why, oh! why, must I be kept from my enjoyment today, by those black clouds over yonder that 'obstinately' do not disperse?

Some will find this portrait of Hegel not altogether attractive, but there was plainly a more jovial, congenial side to the man who liked his wines and his evenings of cards and even flirted with an opera singer. There was much of the professor standing on his dignity, sensitive to slights, making one wonder to what

extent being a professor was a mask for philosophical ambitions far too hyperbolic for a professor, making one wonder if the hyperbolic philosophical ambitions were not *themselves masks* for even deeper equivocations in Hegel himself, and these not only the internal ambiguities of his way of philosophizing. That the philosopher of contradiction became a philosopher who did not like to be contradicted, gives us pause.

Hegel is a philosopher who tries rationally to underwrite self-determining modernity. His commitment to rational self-determining humanity, in its modern form, is finally hard to disentangle completely from a religion of humanity, all dialectical-speculative complications notwithstanding. As Hegel himself said in his lectures on aesthetics: modern art makes *humanity* its new holy of holies (*Humanus heisst der Heilige*).¹⁰ But the point applies beyond art to modern life generally.

There are today members of the church invisible of the religion of humanity who are now generally embarrassed by the word 'religion'. Such a religion may now appear 'insipid', to borrow the term Hegel overused, like the word 'abstract', in dismissing those who disagreed with him. In Hegel's time it was different: the religion of humanity often had to present itself as a philosophy of *Geist*, with surface dialectical equivocations about God which masked the deeper substitution of a self-determining humanity for the religious God of Jewish-Christian revelation. We will have to tease out some of these equivocations, perhaps evasions at the existential, philosophical and religious level.¹¹ This last especially deserves stronger weight, and not least with regard to the 'secret' craving of an intellectual will to power – Hegel's own craving to be intellectual sovereign in his world, and no doubt also, of his world.

As with all powerful philosophers, there is a hazard here. Philosophers with the spiritual ambitions of Hegel pose dangers for those who are less vigorous spiritually, and more feeble intellectually. These dangers can act like poisons that a strong soul can survive, to the weaker they are lethal. I put him in the same class as Nietzsche here. Both knew disguise. Hegel often masked the ambition in the pose of the bourgeois professor. One should not be fooled.

So what then of the question: was he pious? The question is not did he show some form of *amor intellectualis Dei*. The love at issue may be intellectual, and we will revisit Hegel's version of Spinoza's love of God, but there is also more. My impression is this. Though Hegel came from a Lutheran family, I do not divine a strong sense of personal piety in him. There are passages in his work which do evince a religious pathos. We find such passages all throughout his writings from early to later. They clearly testify to his lifelong interest in religion. How to take these is not always easy to say, for in many instances, the pathos has more to do with Hegel's great gift of entering sympathetically into the life of other times and religions, a gift that does not necessarily mean any nostalgia for these times or other forms, or final identification with them. Hegel was an impressive conceptual ventriloquist.

Then there is Hegel's general interest in religion as expressing representationally what a particular culture or epoch takes as its most ultimate values and grounds: the sense of the ultimate or absolute which gives some sense of the whole to our lives. Certainly an openness to the religious was there, but one suspects that its existential power for Hegel himself remains guarded, remains hidden. It seems his mother,

like Kant's, was more pious. Hegel's father was a good burgher with a solid prudential sense that one has to make one's way in the world. Perhaps Hegel partook of both these sides, since if there is a piety he endorses it comes closer to a kind of devotion to the ethical forms of worldly life of the bourgeoisie in which everyday life is consecrated.

Hegel did study at Tübingen, and in principle was tied to that *Stift* for quite a while, relative to his legal commitments and liabilities. He had to ask permission every time he got a different job, and this he did for quite a while – always, understandably, chafing. While at Tübingen, as is well known, he was a close friend of Hölderlin and Schelling. The forces shaping them were certainly powerful with religious ambiguity. Schelling from youth onwards was engaged in the investigation of myth. Hölderlin's own poetic powers were of an essentially sacerdotal or vatic order, and one must remember his own engagement with the world of the Greeks: Dionysus and their gods were presences for him as much as Jesus was. This tension of the Christian and the Greek was central. One of the earliest revealing texts is known as the *Earliest System Programme of German Idealism*. It is attributed to one or other of the three, depending on the scholar, though it is written in Hegel's hand. It has the rhapsodic, overambitious tonality of a youthful ardor that would do everything, and do it all at once. Hegel's youthful ardor never seemed quite so ardent, and indeed his nickname even when young was the Old Man, *der Alte*. Nevertheless, this small text is extremely symptomatic of the times, and traces of many of Hegel's basic themes are there, not to mention prefigurings of themes we often associate with the likes of Marx and Nietzsche: critique of religion as an otherworldly calculus of benefits, a blight on the ecstasies of the aesthetic, a stop on the self-realizations of immanence.

Hegel's wife, Marie von Tucher, evinced a stronger sense of personal piety, concerning which some signs indicate that Hegel thought it too emotional or risking sentiment. The guardedness, perhaps real concealment, of Hegel's personal views might be gleaned from the story about his being asked about his belief in personal immortality. He is said simply to have pointed at the Bible. Hegel says nothing (Pinkard 2000, 577). Such silent pointing can mean many things, mean nothing at all relative to the affirmation of personal immortality. It leaves the space open. This does not mean Hegel left that space completely open. I rather think he had no conviction concerning personal immortality, since when he does speak at all of immortality it is with reference to the immortality of *cognition*: not of the singular but of the universal; not of the human person but of general humanity. Here one notices something of Hegel's intriguing way of saying 'Yes'. 'Yes' on page one becomes so qualified between pages one and three that it looks a little more like 'no' at the putatively more comprehensive later standpoint. One is liable to forget on page three the meaning one imputed to the 'yes' on page one, and hardly notices one has 'passed over' to something rather other.

There is also the fact that after Hegel's death his wife was disturbed by some of the things she read in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, then being prepared for posthumous publication; she also had reservations about things 'vexatious for faith' in some of his earlier writings (Pinkard 2000, 577). Hegel's own son, Immanuel, was initially quite hostile to the old Schelling who, now ensconced in Berlin as *the* philosopher, rounded on the dead Hegel, seeing his mission as to 'stamp out the

dragon seed of Hegelian pantheism in Berlin'. But the defensive deference to his father did change, and the son was in time won over by Schelling, and in his old age spoke of his father's philosophy as an interesting departure from the orthodox way, perhaps suitable for its time, but the time now demanded an understanding of God closer to orthodox theism (Pinkard 2000, 624, 663).

Of course, you might argue, as Hegel would be inclined to do, that these facts of personal biography have nothing essential to do with the truth of his philosophy of religion and God. This is an orthodox philosophical view: truth is not my truth, but truth in the universal, relative to which the particularities of the singular person count for nothing finally. But one could well ask, and not only in deference to Kierkegaard, if this notion of truth is really so simply applicable to the truth of being religious. There is something about being religious, just in the radical intimacy of relation between the human and divine, that cannot be fully accounted for in terms of an impersonal universal. To make being religious answerable to such an impersonal universal is to ask it to come before a judge that refuses to hear it on its own terms. And what kind of philosophical justice could that be, if we do not hear the other, as the other would itself speak for itself? And what if the truth of religion is more like the truth of love, and its language the language of the intimacy of what is most ultimate? Is not such intimate language what the philosophers, Hegel included, have most difficulty in gathering into the form of their logos? Might the impersonal universal contribute, in its high idealistic way, to the counterfeit doubling of God?

Notes

- 1 Here is a sampling on the philosophy of religion: Christensen, ed. (1970), Fackenheim (1971), Chapelle (1964–1971), Reardon (1977), Williamson (1984), Jaeschke (1986, 1990), Shanks (1991), Kolb (1992), Merklinger (1993), O'Regan (1994). On God, see Splett (1965), Kung (1970), Lauer (1982), Schlitt (1984, 1990). Hegel is a significant presence in Heyde's (1999) important effort to rethink the question of God. In my discussion, for convenience, I will often refer to the easily available one-volume edition of Hegel's lectures of 1827 as *LPR*. When necessary I will refer to the three-volume VPR (Jaeschke ed.) and *LPR*, citing the volume number to distinguish this from the one-volume edition of the 1827 lectures. The English translation contains very convenient reference to the pagination of the German edition.
- 2 A work in progress entitled *God and the Between* attempts to do that.
- 3 The contrast of an erotic and agapeic absolute will recur in our discussion; on this contrast, see, for instance, Desmond (1995a, 1995b).
- 4 Process thinkers like Whitehead, or evolutionary thinkers like de Chardin, might speak of something like the 'eros of the universe', but why does one not hear much about this tyrannous form of eros?
- 5 An analogue, with implications for claims to perfection by philosophy: during World War II the Germans sought to sow confusion by distributing in Great Britain extremely good forgeries. They were so good that it was extremely hard to tell the difference between the forgery and the genuine currency. But it was said that the only way to tell the difference was this: the counterfeits were *perfect*, while the real notes had some *flaw*!
- 6 On the different ways of being true, see Desmond (1995a), Chapter 13, 'Being True'.
- 7 There is here also the problem of *authority*. What or who is authorized to offer stability

in an economy of counterfeits, and a regulation of discernment, and ways of telling the difference? If in a society, or epoch, everything seems to be under the rule of equivocity (as some postmodernists imply), then the absolutization of equivocity will not get us the finesse we so need. For finesse is not the absolutization of equivocity but its mindful discernment. An analogous problem effects political communities, religious communities, as well as intellectual and cultural communities.

8 See Desmond (2001a), especially Chapters 15 and 16.

9 Pinkard (2000).

10 See Donougho (1982).

11 Pinkard's biography is excellent, but I think one could tell the story differently if one were to focus more on the existential and religious *evasions* one suspects are hidden deeply in Hegel's thought. Pinkard's Hegel is in line with his own scholarly interpretation of Hegel's philosophy as rationally underwriting self-determining modernity. This is not untrue to Hegel, but to underwrite modernity thus, one has to relativize transcendence as other, as I have already indicated. If some more robust sense of divine transcendence is not to be given up, things will look very different, and apparent coherences much more shaky.

Chapter 1

Finding a Way to Holistic Immanence: Hegel Between Enlightenment, Greece and Christianity

Kantian Enlightenment: On the Refraction of Transcendence Through Immanent Autonomy

The younger Hegel, broadly speaking, sought to find an immanent way between three influences: first, Enlightenment, especially in the figure of Kant, and its wedding of rational science and moral autonomy; second, Greece, in the glory of its holistic aesthetic culture; third, Christianity, questioned by some for being a ‘positive’, that is, authority-based, religion, and yet incontrovertibly there to be dealt with as an influential cultural and spiritual power. A glance at some of Hegel’s early writings makes evident from the outset the guiding thread I have proposed, namely, the equivocal place of transcendence, and the seeds of a dialectical-speculative systematization of that equivocation. Relative to Kant, the Greek ideal, and the influence of Christianity, we see him diversely reconfiguring religion in terms of an ideal of immanent self-determination, both of humanity and of God. There is a movement from law to love, and through beauty, but overall the reconfiguration of transcendence as other in terms of immanent self-determination allows us to see in these early writings traces of the counterfeiting of the Biblical God and the initial production of the Hegelian double.

‘From the Kantian system and its highest completion I expect a revolution in Germany. It will proceed from principles that are present and that only need to be elaborated and applied to all hitherto existing knowledge’: thus Hegel in a letter to Schelling in 1795.¹ Hegel never swerved from the mission of completing that revolution, even if the completion made him also a critic of its instigator, Kant. But first we must step back.

A major consideration to remember is the ambiguous place of religion generally, and Christianity specifically, in the ethos of the late eighteenth century. This ethos shaped a desire for a more rationalized version of religion, when and where religion managed to survive the sceptical assaults to which it was then subject. This reflects the longer arc of modernity. Something about being religious is constitutively ambiguous, and not least the sense of the divine as finally hidden in unapproachable mystery. Our relation to God can easily become frozen into some form of dualism between immanence and transcendence. Some believed this to have happened in the Middle Ages, with an accentuation of the gap between life here immanently in the world and the divine as a ‘beyond’. While Hegel clearly takes his stance in

defense of modernity's affirmation of immanence, rationalizing modernity generally has shown itself impatient with the ambiguities of being religious. The impatience can increase in the measure that they prove stubborn to our rationalizing impulse. We desire to overcome the equivocalities of being with a more univocal intelligibility, but religion resists. We might insist that religion meet a more univocal standard of intelligibility, if it is to be respectable in an age for which the seal of reason counts as the most ultimate endorsement. Yet it resists. Those more sceptical will feel confirmed: religion cannot meet the measure of reason. Those more sympathetic will seek to 'find a place' for religion in the new rationalized ethos.

'Finding a place for religion' – this might describe the desideratum of many thinkers, albeit differently enacted by a Spinoza, or a Kant, or a Hegel. But the project already is witness to the reduced place of 'being religious'. Being religious either relates in some way to the 'whole', or its claim to ultimacy must be compromised. Clearly in more robustly religious ages, to be was to be religious, and this extended in significance to the whole of life. To speak of 'finding a place' for religion does not make sense in such an ethos. Religion has no place because all places are occasions, overt or covert, of some religious significance. (We would not even find 'philosophy of religion'.)² The tension between the so-called specificity of religion and the significance of religion for our sense of the whole is one of importance for the maturer Hegel, for he does recognize that religion must have something to do with our sense of the whole. In his earlier thought, this is less explicit, though it is a consideration.

The point has relevance to Kant, a figure of immense importance in shaping the discussion of the era as a whole, as well as Hegel's views. How describe this importance? Crucial is Kant's qualification of the rationalizing ethos of modernity by the ideal of moral autonomy. Kant accepts modernity as somehow at a higher level of intellectual, moral and spiritual sophistication than previous ages. Intellectually, the developments and successes of modern science are for him incontestable. Newtonianism has given us the truth of nature. We refuse to be kept tied by nature's strings, but constrain her to answer questions of our devising. We show our rational autonomy, responsibility and superiority by putting such questions as free us from the random gropings of previous epochs. One must not only endorse the successful rationalizing of nature by modern science, but also the moral distinctness, indeed superiority of the human being.

The problem, of course, is that this world is too much a machine, one in which human beings do not, cannot feel entirely at home. If the human being is a finite machine in an encompassing machine, can it be at home with itself, hence free? The issue would not even arise. Must not the human being as moral seem anomalous in the total machine? The question here deals with the relation of first transcendence (T1) and second (T2); and it borders on the religious, in having bearing on what is ultimate (third transcendence), and the ultimate form of our inhabitation of being. Pascal and Kant are very different thinkers, but the fear Pascal knew in the silent spaces is not always far from Kant. How make sense of the distinctively human if nature is a mechanism, ruled by the cold univocity of mechanically necessary laws? If we are machines, for some dark reason, we think of ourselves as other to machines. Are we free machines? Or more than machines? And if more, how more? Kant will answer: more as moral. Something

unconditional is at stake with morality. But how make sense of the unconditional in the total machine?

The issue haunts us in modernity. Our view of nature is inseparable from our own self-understanding, and both from some intimation that perhaps 'more' is needed to make fuller sense of these two. If there is nothing sacred about a machine world, what is there sacred about the human being, the profane machine? God is an other always haunting these questions. Kant thought morality gave ultimate significance to the human as human. We are not profane machines but possess moral autonomy, and this last is not any addendum tacked on later to the former. There is a story told that since the *Critique of Pure Reason* seemed to destroy faith, and since Kant could not stand the thought of disappointing his manservant Lampe, he wrote the *Critique of Practical Reason* to bring back the faith he seemed previously to have banished. True or not, it was not Lampe that Kant was satisfying but himself. Indeed he had made room for this satisfaction already in his *Critique of Pure Reason* which only seemed to have destroyed faith. The will for autonomy is the truer face behind the mask of modernity as showing a scientific will to rationalize the world. Kant thought he had already surmounted total mechanism in the explanation of mechanism which traced back ultimately to the transcendental powers of the knower. These are the ultimate sources of the intelligibility we constitute relative to nature. Far from diminishing us, in such a picture we assume an extraordinary place in the ethos of being: sources of intelligible law, and so rational powers a priori; sources also of moral law, since we are self-legislating, even if also the law seems given.

We see something of the *double face* of modernity: there, the objectification of being as other; here, the subjectification of value, even if, as here with Kant, this subject is transcendental subjectivity, and hence supports the elevation of the human being into the most important being in the universe. This is clearly the result of Kant's own meditations on purposes in nature. The human being alone is marked by inherent purpose, is the inherent purpose of nature. One can find passages in his *Critique of Judgment* that remind one of Pascal, as well as Kant's famous hymn at the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason* to the two things that fill him with wonder and admiration: the starry sky above and the moral law within.³ Kant is filled with wonder about the starry skies, but the day will come when admiration will congeal into horror at the emptiness of those cold spaces, and men will feel less jubilation than bewilderment at our freakish place in the immensity of the nothing. If Newtonian mechanism is the truth of nature, the place reserved for our hymns to the starry skies is soon claimed by a more disenchanting successor who will not sing of wonder but will shout with revolt.

The ontological sweats generally are kept well down in Kant's Enlightenment scheme. They may surface in his discussion of radical evil. But these sweats have everything to do with God, and the absence of God, as Hegel will realize more fully, and not only him, but others too like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Kant at once makes an onslaught on the pretensions of speculative reason that dreams on an empty 'beyond', and also offers an immanent elevation of the human as practical reason into the position of superiority, the only being of intrinsic worth in nature as a whole. In all of this, the position of God becomes more and more ambiguous and precarious. If the ethos of being is exhausted by definition in terms of the twin

processes of objectification and subjectification, of mechanism and autonomy, where then is there any place for the divine as other to these? This is the question of transcendence as more (T3), more than the external transcendence of nature (T1), well matched by transcendental subjectivity, and more than human self-transcendence (T2), well answered for, so it seems, in terms of humanity's autonomous self-determination.

What I called the antinomy of autonomy and transcendence is well illustrated by Kant. Kantian autonomy refers us to our own self-legislation; transcendence refers to an other beyond our determination. If that other is God, transcendence as other exceeds the resources available to us in an ethos ultimately defined by autonomy. The more we stress autonomy as our absolute value, the less regard will we have for the claim of transcendence as other. Just that otherness always seems to work as a limit on our autonomy. If we make autonomy absolute, transcendence must be relativized to us; but if transcendence as other to us is absolute, then we must relativize autonomy. Kant, like many in modernity, is caught somewhere *between* these alternatives, though drawn to the first side of the dilemma. For autonomy is perhaps *the* 'god' of modernity, a god that, I underscore, Hegel does not repudiate, even though he does try to give, as we will see, a more complex, dialectical version of it in terms of social self-determination. But if God is truly transcendent, and other to us, even if involved in the deepest intimacy of communication, we have to cast question on 'autonomy', certainly with respect to any effort to absolutize its claims. We need to think a freedom other than autonomy, in relation to which God as transcendence frees rather than being a mere negating limit. If there are freedoms beyond autonomy, the question of God will appear differently.

You object: Does not Kant deal with the antinomy by formulating his new moral way to God? It might seem so, but it is not quite so. Remember that Kant makes problematical the whole relevance of reason, in its theoretical use, to the question of God. As is well known, he subjected to critique the 'traditional' proofs, as understood by eighteenth-century rationalism, and found them all wanting. The most famous of the so-called a priori proofs is the ontological argument: purely from the idea of God as the being greater than which none can be conceived, we can prove with necessity God's existence. Kant claims to refute this argument, on the basis of an epistemology that essentially claims that a concept as such involves possibility, while claims of existence extend beyond possibility, and this on the basis of evidence gathered from sense experience. On the basis of a concept alone, all one can establish is further possibility, not existence. There is a gap between concept and existence which cannot be bridged by concepts alone. This applies also to the concept of God. Whether Kant gives a good account of the ontological proof, we need not here decide.⁴ The consequences, however, are extensive. Kant claims that all the other a posteriori proofs, while seeming to be based on evidence within experience, make surreptitious use of the ontological proof, and with this, they also fall – fall, that is to say, with respect to the claim to establish with rational necessity the existence of God.

The younger Hegel seems more taken with Kant's moral way, but central to the older Hegel will be a speculative rehabilitation of the ontological argument. In the most fundamental sense of the concept or *Begriff* for Hegel, you cannot establish a gulf between possibility and actuality. The true concept is self-actualizing, and

hence it is true only as being, only as being beyond a dualism of possibility and actuality: it actualizes itself. In a sense, the Hegelian concept performs the ontological argument on itself: it gives itself existence by thinking itself. There are many more qualifications to be introduced, but it is important to remember that not everyone acquiesced in Kant's so-called demolition of the ontological argument. A different view of knowing and being, concept and actuality, asks a different interpretation of it.

The way Kant 'problematizes' the role of theoretical, speculative reason in relation to God reveals something essentially *double-sided* in his way of thinking. This is relevant to Hegel's dialectical reformulation of double-sided thinking as two sides of a more *unitary* speculative reason. Where *here* Kant says 'no', *over there* he seems to say 'yes'. By 'over there' I refer to Kant's claim that practical reason can do what theoretical reason cannot: establish God's existence as a necessary postulate. The argument can be summarized. Our moral being, despite the primacy of duty and virtue, cannot be entirely divorced from the search for happiness. But there is a tension, indeed disjunction between happiness and virtue. One can be virtuous and unhappy; one can be happy and not good. And yet the human being is an exigence for *both*, and the unity of both. How can we think the *togetherness* of the two? Kant answers in terms of the *summum bonum*. Note God is not the *summum bonum* for Kant, as God is, for instance, in Augustine and Aquinas (happiness, as the vision of God, is the supreme good for us, but the supreme good, the possession of which affords happiness, is God). Kant's approach is *not primarily intent on God*, but on a disjunction in our own moral being.

This disjunction runs extremely deep. We cannot underestimate what is here at stake. Much of Hegel's thinking is directed to such deep disjunctions and their overcoming. The disjunction precipitates the archaic perplexity: Why do the wicked prosper, why are the just cast down? The outcry for a fuller justice is present in the scriptures, in some of the heart-rending psalms, and not only there. Kant hides most of this existential pathos, but we should not be fooled by the sober mask of reason. This disjunction threatens the sense of *the whole as good – the ultimate good of it all*. If there is no happiness merited by the virtuous, there seems something scandalously amiss in the whole. To alleviate this disjunction, on this side of life, Kant appeals to the divine, on the other side of life: God gives a *ground of unity* relative to which duty and happiness can be brought into perfect accord. On the *other* side of life, of death, we must postulate, on the basis of our moral being, a *being beyond finitude*, and indeed our continued being (immortality), to make intelligible the possibility of the completed accord of virtue and happiness. This postulated God is a moral good, who will reward a person with a perfectly just accord between happiness and moral merit – merit itself being determined by the worthiness to be happy established by virtue for the sake of virtue.

Leaving aside many complications, my point is simply this. Kant is concerned with a *sense of the whole*, and this he interprets in terms of God who gives a moral meaning to that whole, and in the process confirms the position of pre-eminence of the human being, within that whole, as an end in self.⁵ Kant's sense of the whole makes reference beyond finitude, and moral autonomy, to a moral God that does remain other. Because of this otherness, a transcendence remains which works *against* any claim of *one* immanent whole, within which all is to be included. This

sense of the whole, because of such a moral transcendence, does not give us immanently an absolute whole, only moral pointers in that direction. Hence the importance of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* for Hegel and his generation (hesitant steps are also evident in the *Opus Posthumum*).

The sense of the whole: this is one of the most important considerations in any approach to the question of God. This is as true for atheists as for theists, for a Marx as for a Hegel, for a Nietzsche as for a Kierkegaard. This sense bears on our 'feel' for the ethos of being. This 'feel' is very hard to pin down. More often than not, it is left unthematic, and this despite the fact that its silent insinuation has immense influence on the *determinate forms of thought* that come to more self-conscious expression. The ethos is a back-ground that is not just back there; it is at work in the fore-ground, but it cannot there be identified as such. Only with a shift in feel for the whole, does this become more evident. Thus when earlier peoples lived within a religious ethos, this feel was not always thematic, and only is felt as perplexing, by both the religious and non-religious, when a shift occurs in our sense of the whole, a shift that may occlude, or stifle the springs that water the religious sense of being. Hegel's reformulation of Kantian autonomy in terms of an inclusive self-determining freedom, with corresponding retractions from transcendence as other, both reflects his 'feel' for the ethos and effects it.

In this light, it would be a mistake to think of Kant's criticisms of the 'proofs' as only a matter of reason, and not also of ethos. To refer to the 'traditional' proofs can be misleading, if taken to imply an unbroken, univocal past to these proofs. The version of the proofs Kant criticized were in the form articulated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when, despite Pascal's plea for the *esprit de finesse*, the *esprit de géométrie* was in the ascendent. The geometrical mind – used here in a broad metaphorical way – informed the rationalist project, as indeed also the empiricist, in that rationalism and empiricism are two phases in the same unitary project to reduce the equivocal appearances of nature to dianoetic form, approaching as much as possible the ideal of mathematical exactness. The premodern version of the ontological argument is not situated in the post-Cartesian ethos of ascendent geometry, but in the milieu of spiritual finesse that is solicited by a community of worship, or prayerful meditation. Note the modern use of the concept of a *triangle* to illustrate what might be involved in a 'concept'. If Kant sought for any finesse it was in the moral realm, even though here he sought a necessity that morally counterparted the more mathematical necessity granted by Newtonian mechanism *vis-à-vis* external nature.

Even then too, if the ethos is dominated by the geometrical mind, and its ideal of intelligibility, this sense of the geometrical can have its own subtleties. Thus in premodern speculation, the divine and geometry were partners – a view beautifully expressed in Plato's *Timaeus*, a major inspiration of theological cosmology and speculative images of the whole in traditional thought. But the geometry with which Plato's demiurge works is situated in an ethos in which resonances of a mythic reverence are not at all absent. Something of this more original divine milieu moderates the metaphor of the geometer, and short-circuits the temptation to rigidify the divine into a deterministic clock-maker God. The finesse of this premodern reverence is not the moral respect in which Kant takes succour, just as the geometrical form is alive with musical resonance. And even though the God of

Anselm's proof is more radically monotheistic, the ethos of reverence is still the home of his thinking of God. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rationalism progressively deracinates reason from this ethos. Indeed, it makes reason homeless in a world which now, as a strange other, must be made to conform to the demand for intelligibility made by a form of reason estranged from its own roots in an ontological reverence.⁶

No wonder then that Kant can and will 'deconstruct' the proofs ('deconstruction' is the later, naughtier cousin of 'critique'). Why be surprised if in this ethos, the ontological proof proves finally empty, and the concept of God can purchase no existential claims on its own terms? Why be surprised if appeals to a posteriori evidences can never yield certainty and necessity (putting aside their alleged dependence on the ontological proof)? The evidences in nature as other (T1) will always be infected with some ineradicable equivocity and uncertainty. Kant turns then to the moral *self* (T2) as the one place in which a more promising way to the divine (T3) is to be found. Yes, there is some gain in finesse here: there is something extraordinary about the human being: an unconditional exigence emerges with us, and if so, here is the immanence of the unconditional; perhaps here we may open to something more absolute even than the moral law in us. And yet we cannot forget our fear of an emaciation of the ontological milieu: moral man seems the only pinpoint of inherent value in the immensity of being, the rest of which is exposed to being degraded to mere godlessness. If this is a variation on the Pascalian theme, one must ask if finesse has been too contracted into the moral self, as the last bolthole of inherent worth in the valueless whole?

What has this to do with Hegel? Hegel's philosophical search was for a new sense of the whole. Does this serve a more healthy finesse for the ethos? Hegel does not speak this way, but I do not think he would demur. If Kant saw that rationalism was not enough, Hegel pushed this line further, but in the name of a different version of reason than Kant's. A holism of nature will be reformulated, showing an inspiration more Spinozist than Newtonian.⁷ Our relation to God cannot be confined to our moral being. It is interesting that while the younger Hegel was much engaged with Kantian morality and religion, he disengages himself from the moral proof. In his later lectures this way, *qua* 'proof', does not figure importantly, even though ethical life seems to be the highest *Gottesdienst*.⁸ Hegel will take into account feeling, representation, the cult and the religious community. With typical philosophical predilection, he will light on thinking as the true being of the divine. He will reformulate the ontological proof in the element of pure thought, as he understands this, and be more rational than the rationalists and Kant. If there is finesse here, is there enough, or the right finesse? If morality does not give us finesse enough for God in Kant, do dialect and speculative reason in Hegel? A question to occupy us again.

The importance of the whole, *das Ganze*, is of special moment for Hegel.⁹ Against the perceived fragmentation of modernity, his speculative system will think God as a God of the whole. Is Hegel's 'God' the whole, or is there a God beyond the whole? Does the ethos of being, while communicating some sense of the whole, also point beyond the finite whole? The issue of transcendence beyond the whole comes in here. Of course, there are clearly complications here, most glaringly the question: What could there be beyond the whole? Nothing it seems. How then a

God beyond the whole? Would that God be nothing? Or must we acknowledge that finite ways of speaking run against extraordinary difficulties when we come to that limit? This is a problem Hegel thinks he solves in terms of a dialectical surpassing of limits: the whole determines itself in its own self-actualization: it is its own limit and the surpassing of its own limit, for it is itself on both sides of the limit. Would not this self-accomplishing whole be an entirely immanent god? Hegel's whole is infinite not finite, though it contains finitude within itself. What then is the relation *between* finitude and infinity? Is it then all a matter of immanence: holistic immanence? Would not transcendence as other have been sacrificed to this immanent autonomy of the whole? But we are running ahead.

In sum: Kant offers us an understanding of autonomy, but set over against nature, and a moral God beyond nature. Hegel thinks Kant is right to stress freedom, but thinks his form of self-determination is dualistically formulated, and hence fails to be fully self-determining. While criticizing Kant's autonomy, this still functions as a kind of template, even while Hegel reformulates it as a self-determination process that overcomes all others as its own limits, including all transcendence as other. The antinomy of autonomy and transcendence Hegel seeks to resolve in terms of an absolute self-determining God, no longer transcendent, but absolutely immanent, and one for whom immanence is its own self-transcendence. There is nothing beyond this absolute whole, and all transcendence is immanent transcendence, the self-transcendence of either the human or God, though even their difference is also less than ultimate, since both manifest the self-determination of the whole. The God beyond the whole is mirrored, or mimicked, in this self-accomplishing whole, that creates the appearance of being its own *causa sui*.

The Shining Dream of Greece: Transcendence Immanent

We can now see why the shining dream of Greece so inspired Hegel's feel for the whole beyond mechanism. But is this to put the cart before the horse by treating of Kant before turning to Greece? I would argue rather that perceived difficulties with the Kantian approach, as well as recalcitrant dissatisfactions with Enlightenment generally, induce something of a sympathetic openness to the Greeks. And there is another Kantian factor, not yet mentioned: the moral community. This is of immense importance for Hegel, and provides a kind of link between Kant and the Greeks, and indeed Christianity. Kant's kingdom of ends was in one sense accepted by Hegel but in another sense significantly qualified: modern autonomy must be defended, but a more holistic form of it must be developed to deal with the dualisms Kant's version inevitably engenders. Hegel does not deny the ideal of self-determination at the core of Kantian autonomy, but seeks to give it a more holistic form, in which not least the individualism of Kantian morality is superseded by a more inclusive *social form* of self-determination. The struggle to articulate the social and political form of modern freedom is inseparable from Hegel's early struggles with religion.

A dominant philosophical view is not only inseparable from the ethos of an era, but may contribute to its reconfiguration, just by claiming to be its true self-understanding. What is stressed in the dominant philosophical self-understanding

mirrors the ascendent forms of cultural life. Philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought, Hegel will later say. Religion and its practices are not immune from this. While Kantianism has often been identified as a species of secularized Protestantism, more precisely, Pietism shorn of enthusiasm and sentiment, less often is it considered what the Kantian transformation itself indicates about the ethos in which it is formulated. Kantianism both *reflects* and *reshapes* the ethos of its time: reflects a rationalizing and moralizing of the divine; reshapes the religious by accentuating those aspects that pass muster with the rationalizing and moralizing. If the reflection mirrors something that in itself has already been contracted, then the reshaping may tend further to exacerbate that contraction.

Suppose again that Kantianism reflects a rationalism responsive to the value-less ethos of Newtonian mechanism, stripped of evident traces of the divine; suppose it recuperates its sense of unconditional value in the moral subject; will not the result *both reflect and entrench the gulf* between the value-less, godless world, and the holy of moral holies which is the Kantian practical subject? But is this not to produce a whole torn apart into extremes: godless heteronomy, absolute autonomy? And to produce within the moral subject a similar rending into extremities: sensuousness and reason, the empirical and transcendental, impulse and obligation, happiness and virtue? And *between* that internally divided whole and the divine principle *beyond* that whole, what have we? It will not be easy to avoid reproducing a similar sense of division. And suppose the self-understanding of being religious *reformulates itself* in terms of these divisions? Relative to nature, one will lack a sense of a sensuous rich whole. Relative to the human being, one will feel our embodied being as a potential curb, even threat, to the purity of moral duty, and before it feel *shamed* that it refuses to let one forget one's lower nature. And between that immanent whole and God, a precarious relation, now little more than indifferent externality such as seems to obtain between the deistic god and creation, now an externality fraught with questionableness and danger. Questionableness: for what need have we for such a divinity, if all the essential work can already be done by autonomous immanence, properly secularized, and rationalized? Danger: for maybe our relation to this seemingly extrinsic God is just the source of the immanent sense of alienation? Is this 'God' then at the source of nature's godlessness and worthlessness; source of the evaporation of its beautiful sensuous glory; source of, or at least intimately implicated in, the shame of finitude before itself and not least its own embodied being; source finally of humanity's alienation from all the truer immanent sources of originality that, in moments of inspiration, properly express our being?

I have just named some of the main strains in the ethos of the eighteenth century in which one sees a silhouette of what a century later will be called the death of God. The earlier silhouette seemed to show the *necessary* shadow of 'God'. The same silhouette later seemed to reveal this shadow as simply *nothing*. And even today, we have not escaped this nothing, or shadow.

If the need for a living sense of the whole grips one with urgency, it is understandable why something like a 'nostalgia' for Greece should take hold, as it did with Hegel's generation, and Hegel himself. Nor should we be surprised that the dream of Greece, the longing for pre-Socratic Greece, or yearning for the age of tragedy, should have cast its spell on, say, Nietzsche, and later Heidegger. The

disenchantments of modernity induce malnourishment of the religious sense. The dream of Greece seeks to allay the hunger but springs from ineradicably religious sources: reactive to an anorexic Christianity, projective of a robust sacral immanence. The dream of Greece represented an image of aesthetic wholeness, in which philosophy, art, politics, religion were integrated in a living, organic, immanent totality. What need then of divine transcendence as other?

And so the shining dream of Greece seemed to hover like a saving apparition to Hegel's generation, an apparition of saving wholeness. Did not the Greeks dwell in nature, but in no neutered sense? Thales: All things are full of gods. In a way, the whole was holy for them; for us, the whole is neutered, and more unholy than holy – the whole worthless, apart from us. And did not the Greeks celebrate their embodiment, elevating it to the level of idealized art in which shame seems to have no place: nakedness perhaps modest, but not shamed at itself? Look indeed at their images of the gods, as present there in immanence with the perfection of the idealized human body. Compare to the shamed body of moralized Kantianism or Deism, or Christianity. And again, was there not an integrity of cultural style such that art, philosophy, religious and political life could not be compartmentalized into specialized zones? There is no speciality of the whole. The Greeks, we surmise, lived a sense of the rich whole. And finally, are their gods, exemplars of wholeness, not immanent gods? There is no dualism between immanence and transcendence, hence no problem of bridging a gap from 'here' to 'there'. What seems there is here; the gods are present and heal; even as their presence is also dangerous; but healing or a danger, they seem implicated in our life, and while in many ways indifferent to mortals, without them life would be flat and lack the charge of ultimacy.

This shining whole appeared and disappeared before the eyes of the generation. And do not object that Plato is a refutation of all that. Nietzsche will make a virtue of this exception, and say, yes indeed – but look at Socrates and Plato as the *destroyers* of this Attic wholeness! These rationalizers of life infect the poetic vitality of the aesthetic whole, and cause it to sicken. But Plato was not 'Greek', but a Jew, an Attic Jew, or worse, a Jew of a 'freer confession', that is, a 'Christian'. As Nietzsche famously said: Christianity is Platonism for the people. I speak, of course, only with a Nietzschean tongue in my cheek, but let it not escape notice, though, how the issue of *transcendence* hovers over all this, and not in the most subtle form either. Let it not escape notice, how Judaism, Platonism, Christianity, Kantianism are tarred with a brush that paints on them the brands: dualism, transcendence, the 'beyond'. And Hegel? Hegel waits impatiently in the wings.

The 'nostalgia' for Greece might be seen as either reactive or recuperative, but in both instances, it is inseparable from the spiritual wasting that was symptomatic of the ethos of the times: a sense of something missing in the dominant philosophical perspectives, of debility in the religious forms of life and associated practices, of freedom unrealized in the social whole. (Why does this sound so familiar to us *now*?) Here in this shining dream was an *immanent otherness* that allowed people to see *themselves*: themselves as they now thought themselves to be, and themselves as they might dream themselves to be, as other to the destitute time, as Hölderlin will call the time (*wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?*).

How was the destitution of the dominant ethos then defined? By our reconfiguration of the milieu of being in terms of a variety of dualisms: between

humanity and world, between world and God, perhaps between humanity and God, indeed between humanity and itself. Much might be said about the role of late medieval voluntarism in preparing for such a reconfiguration of the ethos. I can only mention it. Add then the dissatisfaction with medieval dualisms as the project of Enlightenment begins to take more full form. Add to this dissatisfaction, a *satisfaction* with the stress on autonomy and immanence. Whither then turn for satisfaction of the desire for a richer sense of ethos and god-presence? One cannot go back to medieval Catholicism, it seems; for this embodies Gothic heteronomy: transcendence overarches autonomy, perhaps squashes it, buttressed by 'world-denying' ideals such as evangelical poverty, chastity and obedience (heteronomy ritualized!). Why not in premodernity? Why not do an 'end-run' behind Christianity to Greece? Many before Heidegger made that 'end-run', better 'beginning-run', since it promised a return to origins. Is it fair to think of this 'nostalgia' for paganism as a kind of surrogate for the lost sacramental sense of the ethos of being? We desacralize nature, and the real presence seems lost, but the shining dream of Greece beckons with a pre-Christian version of sacral immanences, including those of the body itself. One might dream of a unity of powers, in oneself, in society perhaps, indeed in nature and the cosmos itself.

Now Hegel strides from the wings. Feeling the attraction of the shining dream, there was much of him that was tossed *between* Greece and Enlightenment. Some of his earlier writings reflect the pull of the former as concrete, and distaste for the latter as spiritless. They also reflect an early and late distaste for Catholicism, bordering on bigotry at times, and a mixture of anxiety and anger at its putatively false dream of transcendence as an elsewhere other. His love of Greece is perhaps most sweetly sung in eloquent elegies in his *Phenomenology*, as well as in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. There, Greece, this *Reich der Kunst*, as Hölderlin calls it, is sung for its achievement of the consummate perfection of the Ideal, the task of beauty peculiar to art. Never has there been a more beautiful time, he says.

The contrast with Christianity and Judaism informs Hegel's early essays. And in his much later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Greek religion will forever remain the religion of beauty. I merely draw attention to the religious meaning of the aesthetic here for Hegel. It does not have to do with a post-Kantian aestheticism. It has to do with the expressive intimacy between the sacred and the artistic. This obtained in the Greek world. One could give a reading of Hegel's aesthetics just in this light, where the crux of the matter is defined in terms of the interpenetration of fundamental senses of the divine with dominant art forms. Our images of the divine communicate our most ultimate appreciation of the ethos of being and the fundamental powers at play there. Mostly the art of an epoch can tell one of this religious feel for the ethos, tell one, moreover, of what may remain relatively unthematized at the level of reflective thinking. This would be another book, and I have written on this elsewhere.¹⁰

The point here bears on the character of Greek religion, called *Kunstreligion* in his *Phenomenology*, a point on which Hegel did not waver. *Kunstreligion* is not a religion of art. In a way, it is not art at all, certainly not as this is meant since Hegel. It is *religion* in the form of art. Our being religious takes form in different aesthetic shapes, and here Hegel's discussion of the Symbolic, the Classic and Romantic forms of art could be situated. In Greece, art is *the form*, the consummate way, in

which the absolute is expressed. Hegel's focus is as much on the absolute as on the art, and the art, in fact, is religious through and through. It also expresses a sense of the whole, something that made it so attractive to Hegel and his generation. In the form of art, all the divisions that seem at the source of the malaise of modernity seem already to have been transcended. Transcended in an immediacy of wholeness; not thoughtless, yet not the product of abstract thought; a wholeness in aesthetic form, attuned to the immanent body of the world itself. If we seem at the opposite extreme to 'spirit' as supposedly disembodied, this is not true for Hegel here. The Greek embodiment of the aesthetic whole reveals the aesthetic as taking in all the dimensions of human culture, hence also all the expressive powers of spirit or *Geist*. This is just the point: no dualism of aesthetic and religious, of sensuousness and spirit. The sculpted images of the Greek gods, as idealized human bodies, most powerfully embody their *complete thereness*: the sensuous immanence of absolute spirit.

Just this aesthetic immediacy of the absolute was the great power and achievement of Greece, but also its limitation. Relative to the discords of modernity, it cannot finally be the home where we can rest. Again the sense of the whole is at issue, for these discords of modernity are deeper wounds than aesthetic religion can heal. Not least, we must take into consideration the interiority of the human, that sense of infinite inwardness of the subject (see T2) that is perhaps the most powerful inheritance of the successor of Greek religion, namely, Christianity. We must take into account rational and reflective culture: this is not the preserve of modern enlightenment, but it is the proximate problem that has to be addressed. The emergence of rational reflection, and the demands of self-consciousness expel us from the aesthetic home of Greece, and if we are to rebuild a home in the divisions of modernity, the power of rational thought must be a major contributor for us, if not the leader.

Hegel will find silver linings in the many clouds of modernity, and the sun of reason will finally outshine the gloom. In this, finally, Hegel is an heir of Enlightenment, more hyperbolic in the demands he makes of reason than Kant, even though more sensitive to the many-sidedness of human existence and historical culture. Given these demands of the ethos in modernity, Hegel finally turned from making that shining dream the touchstone of the present and the way to the future. He was close to the Romantics, but came to despise them for not seeing, as he claimed to see, that reason was to lead us to the future, by comprehending the present and past. There is a note of shrillness restrained in his denunciations of the Romantics, as if he still had to quieten a longing in himself that never quite was extinguished from that most beautiful of all times – as he will continue to admit Greece to be. (Why do I think of his admiration in Berlin for the renowned opera soprano, Anna Pauline Milder-Hauptmann?)¹¹

And yet in all dreams of fulfilled immanence, do all longings for transcendence as other finally leave us alone? I doubt it. I cite a younger contemporary of Hegel, a poet who felt the pull of the Greeks, and sought his own song of the earth: John Keats. Keats, on seeing the Elgin Marbles, remarked that he felt 'like a sick Eagle looking at the sky'.¹² Memorable words; but we must taste the savor of their pith. So too others, with something of the seed-longing of the muse in them, have felt before the art of Greece. The sky: above us something immense, and immensely

powerful, and there. Sick eagle: wingless, or will-less, or only fledgling, or merely debile of the power that is in us. Hegel perhaps felt this sickness. Perhaps also, since the sky was 'beyond', he concluded it best not to try to fly there yonder; remembering too perhaps Kant's prohibition on the dove of metaphysics flying into the 'beyond' in an empty resistanceless ether. I imagine Hegel murmuring, after Kant's whisper and before Nietzsche's shout: I will remain true to the earth! After all, that kind of flying makes us feel sick. But *that* is not at all Keats' dismay. It is the sky, the sky that makes us sick; but our sickness is that we cannot fly. And for this we long. The dismay is admiring, it is a love.

Should one say that Hölderlin felt this sick feeling more continuously, Hegel more intermittently, and more intensely only when young, and closer to the company of Hölderlin? Perhaps Hegel came to know that *he* could not fly on those wings, though Hölderlin could and did try, perhaps succeeding in his failing. Hegel abandoned the deep dismay, looked otherwise at the sickness than as a homesickness, and claimed to develop a different philosophical *therapy*. Was this therapy one that *no longer looked at the sky*? For that must make one sick – for there is always a higher power above we love but do not touch or have. Hegel would have it, the higher power, *here* – but having it here cannot but be another sickness, just in its denial of the first (home)sick looking. For there is a power *above us*, claim what health we will; and always will be above us, even when in love it comes among us ...

Taking the Immanent Measure of Christianity: Equivocations on Transcendence

Christianity proclaims that the spirit has come among us, first shown in the singular human, Jesus, thereafter known, for Hegel, beyond singularity in the community that determines its own freedom. Initially Hegel tended to see corrupting effects of transcendence dualized, as he also saw in Judaism. If Greece consummates the religion of beauty, Judaism will later be the religion of sublimity, and while the younger Hegel is very harsh on Judaism, even the later more nuanced attitude cannot dissimulate his difficulties with God beyond the whole – transcendence as other. The later nuance is not entirely discontinuous with the earlier harshness. But first we look at some of the early ambiguities, and Hegel's efforts to make a way for that immanent spirit said to be among us.

In his so-called *Early Theological Writings*, Hegel was occupied with the contemporary state of religion, and with reference to a revitalization of the socio-political ethos. These are intriguing documents, complex with many strands, some anticipating more enduring orientations, others exploratory of possibilities left in relatively rudimentary state. The contrast of contemporary Enlightenment and the dream of Greece is recurrent, as is a wrestling with the perceived feebleness of established Christendom. Some of the broad misgivings with the contemporary ethos, previously noted, are to be found. I see Hegel wrestling with the recurrence of different variations of transcendence as other in Judaism, Christianity and Kantianism, and how to reconcile that with freedom understood as self-legislating. Overall for Hegel some form of the latter ideal is non-negotiable, not necessarily as so stated, but as operatively informing the entire effort. Hegel was perplexed at how

invidious heteronomies, as he took them to be, repeatedly overtook the purity of moral self-legislation in historical Christianity, distorting the purer message of the founder of Christianity, a message, in essence, indistinguishable from the purer moral spirit again renewed through Kantianism. Hegel cannot make way for a divine transcendence as other to human self-transcendence, and reconfigures the affirmation of the former in terms of the paradigm of the latter. His occlusion of a more radical transcendence as other is already at work, and the busy refashioning of a double of God in which a logic of self-determination restlessly twists and turns, this way or that, but finally does not lose track of its secret goal, a secret not here fully named, perhaps not even known as such – absolute self-determining being – the new ‘God’ of Hegel.

I confine myself to four key considerations: first, the focus of Hegel’s concerns – politics, positivity, transcendence; second, his picture of Jesus, and in relation to Judaism, the issue of the Law and its heteronomy; third, the ethical function of religion and Hegel’s social-political vision; fourth, the issue of love, as reflecting transcendence, freedom, community and the nature of God. While my remarks cannot be fully systematic, yet they are backed by systematic considerations.

First Consideration – Politics, Positivity, Transcendence

Hegel’s core concerns reflect his younger desire to be a teacher to the people (*Volkserzieher*). It is the people as a moral, political, cultural community that is of interest and the role of religion in all this. Hence the concern with a *Volksreligie*. Hegel’s *Theologische Jungenschriften* have been rendered into English as *Early Theological Writings*, but a careful reading reveals them as less univocally theological, as more equivocally *theological-political*. They might well have been named: *Early Theological-Political Writings*.¹³ Hegel is primarily interested in socio-political community as the worldly institution of freedom, and with religion as showing the riches or poverty of the overall cultural ethos which articulates the ideals, or ultimate values, of a particular people. Concern is less with religion *per se* as with the worldly form of a modern community of freedom. How can or must religion serve a viable vision of such a modern community of freedom? There is something *strategic* in all this. Of course, Hegel came to realize that religion was more complex the more he tried to appropriate it, but one asks if the appropriation here was for purposes not completely seamless with religion itself.

There is the search for something like a Kantian morality made more sensuously concrete in society: a vision transcending the Kantian dualism, but in terms set by Kant’s affirmation of the unconditional dimension of morality, with its turn to immanence radicalized, hence with hostility to feeling and sensuousness moderated, if not overcome. Hence the attraction of the Greeks again. Religion, morality, society, aesthetic being, formed an immanent unity. Something about Judaism and Christianity breaks asunder this immanent unity. Something like that unity must be reconstituted, and with the incorporation of what Judaism and Christianity might or can bequeath to a modern, maturely rational culture. In many of Hegel’s discussions, modern Christianity may come off the worse by comparison with the Greeks. But the Greeks are a standard with which to beat the moderns: not a reason to abandon modernity but an incitement to a new, contemporary wholeness.

Hegel believed a maturer reason must overcome its antagonism to the senses, and hence the importance of imagination and feeling has to be acknowledged. Otherwise religion will not take on the mass power of social embodiment, and will prove itself impotent in a worldly sense. It is that power in the world that is crucial. While Hegel wants more than the rationalized, moralized religion of Kant, it is still the social-ethical purpose religion serves that is of moment. The maturer Hegel, when treating of absolute spirit, will see something more of a free space beyond instrumentalization in terms of a social-ethical-political purpose.

Here one is reminded of Spinoza for whom (in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*) religion has more to do with piety than truth. Since piety has to do with obedience to the sovereign, it is the social-ethical-political function of religion that is at stake, not any claims to truth. Granted, we do not find Spinoza's univocalism, or determinism, nor is imagination seen in quite so negative a light. There is a sense that reason may be for a few, while the religion of the many, the *Volksreligie*, must necessarily speak to imagination and the senses.¹⁴ Hegel, of course, will not accept geometry as the paradigm of universal reason – the power of religion will be intimately connected with Hegel's *transgeometrical* dialectics.¹⁵ But there is a kind of *naturalizing of the supernatural*, even though as with many of his Romantic contemporaries, the project will not be one of demythologization but of finding a new mythology. Still any ideal of self-determining freedom is in the same family as Spinoza's *conatus essendi*: the self-affirming (will to) power that is the being of things. Think of the later echo in the *Philosophy of Right*: freedom as 'the free will that wills the free will'. Later Hegel will also speak of the necessary transformation of substance becoming subject. And yet with Hegel, and friends, there is the cry of the Spinoza-intoxicated, Greece-drunk generation: *hen kai pan*.¹⁶

Is this to understate Hegel's religious concerns? But if one were to read, for instance, the *Positivity* essay for traces of genuine religious feeling, it is not easy to find their strong presence. There is much concern with Church and State, with rights, civil and ecclesiastical, with the Church(es) understood in contractual terms. One feels the smoldering anger against public hypocrisies one associates with juvenile awakenings. One might mistake the outbreak of righteous indignation for a kind of righteousness. But the same smoldering anger might easily develop in a Marxist, even Nietzschean direction. Our question is how far Hegel's development moved beyond juvenile awakening. Hegel was reluctant to leave anything completely behind, even when he moved on. The matter overall is not some sentimental piety, but signs of a sympathetic attunement to what is most essential in religion, a *sine qua non* of mindfulness that transcends the rationalistic superimposition of callow concepts.

Hegel's indignation comes through his analysis which has not a little touch of the *legal brief* about it. There is a quasi-forensic dissection of Church and State, even though Hegel clearly sees that the deep root of faith cannot first be a contract. Perhaps in the historical context one might feel the need to argue thus, but otherwise it strikes one as platitudinously correct. The 'forensic' argument serves as a 'critique', a kind of 'deconstruction', or hermeneutics of suspicion, or negative dialectic, call it what you will, against 'positivity'. Hegel is certainly hostile to the Church, if not to Christianity, while, on the other hand, a *Te Deum* is sung to autonomous reason whose native, that is, immanent powers were miserably corrupted by formalistic,

restrictive disfiguring heteronomous developments. Had these not been imposed *ab extra*, our native powers would have flowered more naturally *true to themselves*. Christianity reverted to Judaism and the bondage of the Law is used to characterize both, some would say, caricature both. The glorious Greeks found their way to pure morality more by an instinct or intuition, not reflectively through reason's self-development to full self-legislating power. Kant, it seems, rationally restored the self-legislating autonomy the Greeks knew intuitively and that now must be more radically freed from the spiritual machinery of all that wretched heteronomy.

The remarkable thing about Hegel, however, is a kind of *thoroughness*. I mean he might begin with a dominant purpose in mind, but his attention to the matter itself induces a transformation in his vision. In this instance, his concern with a variation of cultural-political-theology forces him to pay more and more attention to the specificity of religion itself, even as he tries out different models for the new community of modern freedom. From a more recognizable Kantian position, he seeks to incorporate feeling and imagination and the senses, and in his essay *The Spirit of Christianity*, there are very suggestive remarks about love, and a growing sense of the religious community as paradigmatic of the togetherness not only of God with humans, but of humans with each other. This is something more rich and complex and elemental, requiring more far-reaching reconstructions in philosophical thought than initially seemed evident.

I reiterate the main point. While Hegel was concerned with religion all throughout his career, the nature of that concern is not straightforward. One feels that the religious urgency of ultimacy was often displaced elsewhere as the real focus of that urgency and ultimacy. Religion is in relation to something other – here the cultural crisis of the contemporary ethos. (In the next chapter I look at religion and the crisis of the philosophical knowing.) Even when in the 1820s Hegel began to deliver his lectures on the philosophy of religion, a major precipitating cause was the immanent appearance of Schleiermacher's work, *Der christliche Glaube* (see Crouter (1980), von der Luft (1987)). Against his great rival Hegel initially scrambled to piece together his own views. He did not want Schleiermacher to hold the field unopposed. There was an *external* push, where he seems most to engage the religious purely on its own terms.

Second Consideration – Jesus, Judaism, Law

Sometimes the portrait of Jesus in these early writings has been criticized for being too much a representative of Kantian morality, but the interesting thing, I find, is that Jesus is treated as a *human figure*, in a way that the later Hegel does not really match at all, where Jesus is subsumed into the speculative theology of the Trinity and the logic of the concept. The humanity here may have a Kantian character, though clearly Hegel's struggle with Kant's limits also helped him to see something *more* in Jesus in terms of the gospel of love. I will speak of love below. In the *Positivity* essay Jesus is a teacher of moral virtue, defined in terms of the self-imposed law. He is beyond the heteronomy of the Jews, whose religion is one of servitude: God is the Lord above, an alien being reflected in heteronomous law. Jesus incurred the hatred of the priests, and there was no community to sustain him, and hence he fell back into antagonism. One sees also here in Hegel the less supple

rationalism in which Socrates and Jesus are counterposed: the free intellectual discussion of the former comes off better than the sectarian dogmatism of the latter's disciples. Jesus preached Kantianism for the masses, but make no doubt about it, while the purified philosophical message is too much for the many, it is the truer vision which the rational few alone fully attain. While there will be greater complexity in Hegel's maturer understanding of the relation of representation and concept, *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*, this will not shed the same implications, shroud it in as many dialectical qualifications as you like. This we will see also. Hegel perceives some poverty in rationalistic philosophy, but that there is another poverty of philosophy in relation to religion was not an idea he seriously entertained.

The Spirit of Christianity gives a more rounded picture of religion, but a certain configuration of ultimate immanence is again at work which seems to circumvent the intractabilities of divine transcendence as other. The Jews are again presented in terms of the relation of Lord and slave, of domination and servitude, expressed through the power of the Law as an alien imposition by an alien being.¹⁷ Again Jesus is said to have transcended that servitude to an alien power. The Greek notion of fate is brought in to understand the outcome of his life. Fate is not an alien power outside one or above one, but the hostile power that one has aroused by one's own transgression on life itself and its friendliness: one has made of life an enemy, by one's own enmity to it, and its enmity now takes form as one's own fate. The power of life has been turned against life, which, in turn, turns against the transgressor, though again what looks like an alien power against one, is simply one's own doing. And hence as expressing life against life, fate is also the possible *reconciliation of life with itself*. Hence too the kind of punishment that comes is not a mere legal punishment which is always the alien imposition of an abstract and lifeless power on life itself. This punishment of fate is the reconciliation of life with itself. Upshot: Hegel preserves himself from having to appeal to an alien being or power, outside or above life; hence preserves, in the discord of life, the *immanent unity of life as a whole*.

Note the holistic logic. The fragment seems set against the whole, but in the fragment the power of the whole seeks to restore its own wholeness through the destruction of the hostility of the fragment. This destruction of hostility is the life of *love*, hence love is the power that yields reconciliation with fate, or reconciles fate with itself. In the economy of law and punishment of the Jews, as Hegel presents it, there is no possibility of such holistic reconciliation: only revenge and the continued unhappiness of being caught between life and the life-less power of the Law which threatens to make life itself lifeless. There is surely an element of strong abstraction in Hegel's characterization of the Jews, as if the abstractions of 'law' versus 'life', 'lord' versus 'servant', took on *agency* and somewhat ran away with him. One wonders the same about his use of fate, namely, as attempting to undercut any reference to transcendence as other, and to refigure its seeming alienness as just the hostile face of the power of *immanent* life that has been injured, a hostile face that is not finally *other*. The reconciliation of the immanent whole with itself seems to be preserved, but questions remain unquiet.

Why should a part, the human being, a living part of life itself, turn against life? How does the fragment turn against the whole, and arouse the hostile power? Whence the original hostility? I often think of Anaximander in relation to Hegel: the first

ontological sin is to set oneself as individual against the whole. But if this is true, then short of the whole, *everything* is guilty, including innocence. If Hegel is close to this, can he evade the fate of making *everything in life, less than the whole, contaminated with this ontological guilt*? And would not this contamination be even more radical than the contamination of immanence ascribed to the Jews, and many forms of Christianity? (Even the purity of Jesus as a kind of beautiful soul is an innocence that has its own necessary guiltiness – for this purity is preserved by withdrawal and renunciation, thus already is in a kind of guilt, for what is as other has been shunned.) This contamination seems to arise as a *necessity*, since no part or fragment can escape the fate of knowing and hence hating its fragility in the whole of life. Is there not then *another slander of life* that is fated by this effort to escape the so-called Jewish slander on life of the Law? One might ask the same question of Nietzsche in relation to Jews and Christians, whom Hegel resembles here quite a bit. Can either Nietzsche or Hegel do justice to the 'It is very good' of the Biblical God? It is the creation as other, in its goodness for itself that is affirmed. This God is not the slave-worker resting after toil, that Hegel implies in his dialectical double of activity/work and passivity/rest – as if the Sabbath were the rest day of the slave (ETW, 193). The sabbatical 'It is very good' is a celebrating affirmation of the goodness of finitude itself. Can Hegel's holistic logic do justice to this affirmation, as well as to the negation of the good(ness) of life that is evil? A question we will ask again.

But how, for Hegel, did Christianity become 'positive'? Again this question of heteronomy is a deep worry for Hegel, if there was evident in Jesus a freedom purified of heteronomy. Part of Hegel's answer again includes the legalism of the Jews, defined in terms of master and slaves who accept their Law *from on high*, from a source outside themselves. Jesus was not like the Jews: he was a teacher of moral virtue – not heteronomous. An unself-conscious Kantian was thwarted by Jewish slavishness that frustrated self-legislating autonomy.¹⁸ The distinct note of hostility to Christianity reminds one of Nietzsche in the *Anti-Christ*: Jesus was perhaps not so bad, but then the priest, in the figure of Paul, got the better of the purer message and got hold of the movement, settling it into a social vehicle of the will to sly power of the weak and resentful. Hegel's Jesus is more moral, Nietzsche's more innocent, an idiot who cannot say 'no' – a case of will-lessness *before* will, a case of 'retarded puberty', as Nietzsche puts it.¹⁹

One could say this: sometimes shame before Christianity comes from shame induced by Christianity, and the shame can mutate into hatred at Christianity. There can be much of devotion disappointed, ardor frustrated, in this reversal from shame to hatred (think of this in Nietzsche). Hegel outgrew the more simplistic forms of this, and would reject the imputation. Did they disappear entirely? They changed yes, and some old skins were shed, but some new skins were mutations in which hidden connections to earlier forms were not at all destroyed. There is something obsessive about Hegel in this sense that he *never lets anything completely go*. Hegel wants to have and preserve everything. And while there is a wisdom which knows that the old will reappear in the new, the same wisdom worries about evasions of decisive 'either/ors'. Much depends then on the maturer claim to hold even opposites together. This is Hegel's strength and weakness. Strength: it encourages an opening to everything. Weakness: one might be true to nothing while claiming to be open to everything.

In these early writings of Hegel, Jesus is almost always discussed in terms correlated with what I call the *community of erotic sovereignty*, where the social concern is with the values of *immanent excellence*.²⁰ Jesus is not understood in terms of the *community of agapeic service*, as more ultimate than erotic sovereignty, and in which is communicated transcendent worth, irreducible to the finite terms of immanence, even in its superlative worldly glory. Thus, for instance, the beatitudes of Jesus could never be fully rendered in the language of moral worth, or indeed the social ethical *Sittlichkeit* of the later Hegel.²¹ Relative to them divine transcendence cannot be relativized; immanent fate may have its qualified justice, but this can never be the last judgement. For there is another dimension of height at work, and when this is annexed to Hegel's immanent terms, it is made to mutate in the direction of a counterfeit double of providence.

Third Consideration – Social Religion

The centrality of the societal dimension of religion for Hegel is reflected in the *Positivity* essay in relation to a problem analogous to the contemporary one of the 'privatization' of religion. Religion may be the most intimate of things, and not easily objectified. (Pietism – think of Whitehead – 'religion is what we do with our solitude'.) What then of its social, its public form? In this public form its language easily slips from the intimate. The 'privatization' of religion reminds one of a kind of contemporary *doppelgänger* of the Romantic, subjective protest against institutions.²² It is one of Hegel's strengths that he realized this problem. The 'merely' private is the 'merely' subjective (granted, 'merely' hides a lot of difficulty). This is especially evident in his *Tübingen Essay* on objective and subjective religion. Hegel became more and more opposed to subjective Romanticism but, as we will see, his model of the saving 'objective' is the socially inclusive 'subject'. The opposition of Kantian autonomy and heteronomy will be dialectically dissolved, and the other will be speculatively 'overreached'. The community will be no alien other but the social objectification of the religious 'subject-object'. Here in the *Positivity* essay, in Kant's steps, he grants there are no objective proofs – no objective externality. These indeed are 'heteronomous' dangers to 'autonomy'. Hegel will come to reject an exclusive 'either/or' between autonomy and heteronomy. Concrete autonomy must *take in* heteronomy, and the ensuing community of freedom be conceived as *social* self-determination. We overcome the indeterminate privacy in social self-determination.

What if there is a dialectical equivocity in speaking of social *self*-determination? What if community is not this, much less religious community? For Hegel God too will become social self-determination which overcomes the empty indeterminacy of 'mere' privacy (say, that of God the Father in his mere 'abstraction'). This will be the Trinity as social self-determination. But God has no religion and no need of it. This is a human need, and concerns the space of communication *between* humans and the divine. Religion is not simply divine *self*-communication; and if there is a self-communication of the divine to the human, this self-communication creates a space of otherness between them that always remains as such in religion. This makes religion more ontologically true than any philosophical monism that collapses the difference of divine self-communication (trinitarian self-mediation)

and the religious *metaxu* between humans and the self-communicating divinity. But again I am anticipating.

One last point on Hegel's concern with a *Volksreligie*: one sympathizes with the desire to be beyond subjectivism and objectivism, but the emphasis on social totality hides ambiguities about *loyalties* that are ultimately to *one's own*; and loyalty perhaps to the ultimate as what is *most one's own*, and not at all other. Our same hesitation with respect to the reconfiguration of transcendence as other arises again, since this transcendence is what relativizes all the idolatries of 'one's own'. There is nothing finally that we own, even what is most intimately our own. Of course, it is easy to say that Hegel's concern with a myth for the folk, one's own folk, is disturbing. As disturbing, as it is in some sense correct: correct in that a people needs its own narrative to have a rich sense of its own identity, needs its own mythic image to singularize its own most ultimate identity. But the God beyond the whole means that all immanent totalities must be relativized. One's uneasiness with Hegel concerns whether this God is turned into an absolute whole which, even though it relativizes the finite totalities of this people or that, still exhibits the deep equivocation on transcendence as other, and hence cannot function with the same power of de-idolizing immanence as can the God of true transcendence.

Hegel does not deconstruct the holistic logic but radicalizes and absolutizes it. And while this relativizes finite wholes, it does not escape the more ultimate question whether God is the whole or the Whole of wholes, or an absolute transcendence that cannot be contained in any logic of the whole. These are large questions that will become more pronounced, but one must admit that Hegel did turn his back on what he called *Deutschdumm* (see Pinkard 2000, 311, 313, 390, 487). Of course, there are striking passages where he laments the triumph of Judeo-Christianity over Teutonica, and asks about the absent Teuton gods and heroes. 'Is Judaea, then, the Teutons' fatherland?' (ETW, 149) How seriously take all this? The Enlightenment impulse in him, and the orientation to the universal in it, immunized him from more cramped and aggressive chauvinisms. One theme I note, and an emphasis that would remain: the *Reformation* is decisive; but, notice, the Reformation is also somehow '*ours*' (ETW, 146ff.; see also 124–7). There is something perhaps too self-satisfied in this '*ours*'. One does not rest easy with this '*ours*' – particularly if there is a universalism beyond monism implied by monotheism, and even more, if the universalism is to be agapeic, and where the song of self of '*ours*' is not it. Hegel's development allays some disquiet. But since that development also keeps faith with the notion of *freedom as being at home with what is one's own* (*bei sich sein* ...), for even *the other is one's own other*, our wariness is not dispelled, even if displaced away from cramped chauvinisms.

Fourth Consideration – Loves and Religion

In *The Spirit of Christianity* (and in the fragment on *Love*), Hegel has very interesting things to say about love; and love as more ultimate than reflection, which is inevitably caught in abstraction, hence opposition, hence cut off from the wholeness of life. The essay does show Hegel's maturing, and surer grasp of the many-sidedness of the issue. Life is here absolute, as is love, and not reflection; and this fullness points in a different direction than Hegel will later travel in which the

power of the concept seems to be not only on a par with life and love, but also to exceed them, exceed them anyway in the claims Hegel makes for the concept as more absolutely achieving the reconciled at-homeness with self that is the truer whole. There are some who suggest, not without reason, that love offers some basis for Hegel's maturer understanding of the philosophical concept, in which the relation of self and other, and the fuller self-mediation enabled by a relation of love to the other, richly concretizes the form of self-transcending and self-relating thinking that constitutes the life of the Hegelian concept.²³ In this essay such a claim for the *Begriff* is not made in later forms, but its relevance for the thought of God is not negligible, either here, or in later works.

Some large claims are made for this Hegel here, such as when Kroner gushes: 'Hegel's interpretation is, it seems to me, one of the most remarkable attempts of its kind and belongs among the great commentaries on the inner life and destiny of Jesus' (*ETW*, 10). How easy to be overcome with a certain enthusiasm aroused by the thought of love! The issue is central for God, of course, not only because God is said to be love, in Hegel's most loved Gospel of John, but strongly so within the Biblical tradition. We must be careful not to fall on our knees when the word 'love' is uttered. Hegel will himself reject this genuflection as smacking too much of Romantic sentiment. What I mean is that philosophically we need to distinguish different forms of love, and hence also the different forms of *relativity* involved in each, for these differences will prove crucial for efforts to conceive the being of God, as well as the forms of relation between God, the world and humans. An undifferentiated concept of love is not enough, even if it speaks spontaneously to the heart. Hegel's essay leaves something to be desired on this score. It lacks sufficient analytic clarity on the different forms of love, and hence also cannot answer for crucial consequences, metaphysical and theological, consonant with those differences.

Hegel's understanding of love mirrors his drift towards an overtly holistic form.²⁴ The language of the immanent whole is pervasive, contrasted especially with the separation of Jewish transcendence, and finally too the Christian Church. There is an acrimony towards *asymmetrical* relations, especially as represented by Jewish transcendence (I will speak more of asymmetrical relations in the next chapter). The model of love is the recognition of self in the other ('In love man has found himself in another ...' *ETW*, 278), and the inclusion of both within a more embracing whole. Difference and separation, as opposition, are suspended within the life of the whole. The language of the coincidence of opposites recurs in various registers. A logic of holistic immanence governs all this, and while some loves do conform to this, not all do. To take the decisive instances: if divine love is agape, and if human loves can be graced with love of the neighbor and indeed the enemy, it would have to transcend the self-relation of the inclusive whole that comes to itself in and through the other. It would exceed this circuit and is made available in service of the good of the other as other – agapeic service.

I think the point requires the explicit distinction between four different kinds of love: self-affirming love or self-love; erotic love; philia; agapeic love. The first is the affirmation of the delight in the good of the 'to be' that marks every being: every being affirms its own being, and delights in its own continuation of being. The relation to the other is not to the fore in this, though it is immanent in it, in so

far as the delight in the good of the 'to be' is itself in community with all being as itself manifesting something of this good of the 'to be'. It is self-diffusive in its self-affirming but does not put the stress on strong difference between beings – hence there is a kind of 'univocal' rapture in it, as singularized in the I itself as affirming itself as delight to be. Hegel's feel for the spontaneous vitality of the whole speaks a little to this, I suppose.

The second love, erotic, is a form of self-transcending desire in relation to the other. That relating enters more mediately into the form of loving, and hence it is immediate and mediated: the delight in the 'to be' is mediated through love of the other in which one seeks and finds something that fulfills what in oneself is needed but lacking. There is possible here a kind of circular self-mediation in and through the other. I come to myself more fully in and through the other, and the other gives me to myself in the fuller form beyond initial lack. This need not be the entire tale of erotic love, of course, but one can see something of the holistic tendency in it: in the other I come to myself again, and divisions between us are transcended.

In philia, there is a relation of I and other, and this involves a reciprocity, but it is less defined by the I being mediated to itself through the other. The emphasis is on a more symmetrical giving and receiving. To the friend as an other we are more overtly related in its own intrinsic excellence. Friends are for each other, and in the best instances of friendship, we are beyond the self-insistence that plagues the first self-affirming love, and the inclusive self-mediation through the other that can come to define a circle of erotic relativity. There is more of porosity and allowance of the other, simply as other.

In agape, there is a going towards the other but not from a lack in the lover but from an excess or surplus of good that gives from itself, gives beyond itself to the other. The point of the going towards and the giving is not the return of the giver to itself through the other that receives. The point is to be released to, or to release, the other in its own good as being for itself. There is no circular model of agapeic love. It is not inclusive self-mediation in and through the other. It is surplus love, diffusive like the first, mediating like the second, allowing and porous like the third, but not given from need for itself, not need for self-affirmation, not need for self-mediation, not need for the companionship of the proportionate other. It is beyond self-mediating love, affirming beyond proportionality, a disproportionate relation of being good for the other.

If we say God is love, it is very important to keep these differences in mind. I am convinced that Hegel's God is, as suggested before, an *erotic absolute*. The systematic dimensions of this are not evident in his earlier writings, nor indeed are they fully evident in the later works, in terms of the intellectual resources Hegel himself had available to distinguish these different loves. But there is no doubt that something like it percolates in some of the early writings in a more inchoate way, and also in more articulated form in Hegel's more mature understanding of the concept and of God, indeed of everything.

In each of these four loves, the relation of self and other, and the forms of self-relation and other-relation are different. And each of these differences qualifies the energy of self-transcending that is operative in each; as well as qualifies the balance of *passio essendi* and *conatus essendi*. Hegel's intuitions, in the main, hint of a kind of holism of erotic self-mediation in and through the other. His sense of one's

'own', hence also self-love, knows too little of the *passio essendi* – it is mediated through the *conatus essendi* of the self-becoming of 'autonomy'. There are aspects of *philia* in his discussion of philosophical friendship. But he knows almost nothing of *agapeic* love, and the community of *agapeic* service.²⁵ He is under the bewitchment of a form of the community of erotic sovereignty. This seems to blind him to the difference of the community of love of the early Christians. This is not trying to be a political community in the identifiable worldly sense: a community of faith lives its love in faith and hope of God, just as Abraham answered a call and went into the desert, with no expectation of a return to the first home, though with hope of a new and promised home. Hegel only sees an unnatural rupture, and the spirit of an exclusive independence that secretly is seeking its own dominion over the alien, through the absolute dominion of God as the alien being. He does not see the love that exceeds itself with no demand on a return to itself, or a return to itself from its being in relation to the other. The service of *agape* is not servile. A coarse dualism of master and slave, self-governing power and impotent servility, constitutes the terms on which he thinks of both Abraham and the community of love. His own coarser view must see the corruption of this community into hatred before the other outside the beloved community: that other is finally the hostile other – towards it, love within mutates into hatred outside. This is the working-out of a coarse dialectic of power and servility. No doubt the coarseness does reflect much of life. But that fact settles nothing about the point at issue here. (The same point applies, *mutatis mutandi*, to Nietzsche's genealogy of master and slave morality.)

Still, there is a real suggestiveness about some of the things Hegel says about love, and one wonders if later he either abandons or betrays them. For they allow of developments that might go a different way, and indeed might even break beyond the desire to close the circle of the whole at home with itself. For instance, *agapeic* love might recall the exit of the soul into the excessive life of the divine, irreducible to any immanent whole, though in communication with the finite between. Hegel does not take that way, and the reasons why are already evident in this text: a holistic logic that itself is hostile to the thought of transcendence as other and above and 'beyond'. To assume and think through a non-holistic, yet non-hostile attitude to the latter would require an entire revolution in Hegel's way of thinking. Hegel is close to the heart of the matter, and also very distant: close to understanding something ultimate about love, and yet he misses something crucial. It is the concept that betrays him – even as he seems to subordinate concepts to love – his concept of love that does not understand the life of love beyond holistic immanence. Jesus pointed to this love of *agapeic* service irreducible to holistic immanence, even as it must effect its reconciliations in the fragments of immanence. This has to do with Jesus's understanding of God, indeed the relation between him and God.²⁶

Then there is Hegel's important qualification that love is not enough. Love is still a *feeling*, and if it remains separated from reflection, it is incomplete. Hegel says the truer unity is the unity of love and reflection, but as bound together in *thought*. What this betokens is something of the later Hegel's view of thinking (not reflection, not love) as the ultimate power of unification. Hegel is very sympathetic to love, but this ought not to blind us to a wavering in understanding love, and here the very clear sign that more is needed to be true to the whole. Perhaps the power of unification he claims for thought owes much to his understanding of the powers of

unification of love. But it is also clear for Hegel that beyond love there is a more ultimate power of unification in which separation is more completely overcome.²⁷

Once more the *theological-political* issue arises. For more ultimate also for Hegel is the *worldly concretion* of the reconciling community, and this demands the worldly objectification of love. It is as if Hegel thinks of the community of love in terms of an answer to political impotence (the political impotence of the Jews hovers over the discussion). It is as if agapeic service (though not named as such) is understood in terms of a deficit of erotic sovereignty. This deficit is turned from its servility into an impotent flight to the 'beyond', on the one hand; and on the other hand, it is turned towards itself in terms of the sect that closes into itself in mediation only with itself, in opposition to the whole world outside itself. Such a love is grounded in impotence and fulfills its impotence in hatred. And all because it is the counterfeit of worldly erotic sovereignty. Hegel already anticipates his more mature view that love is not enough, and indeed in this form turns into its opposite. In that light, Hegel's enthusiasm for love is *severely qualified* even in this early essay. If a community of love wins respect, it is as superior to the putative master/slave relation of the Jews, but it also reverts to the form of 'positivity' because of its impotence to establish its worldly sovereignty. This clearly is finally, for the younger as for the older Hegel, the important thing. The more one thinks thus about this early text, the less discontinuous it seems with Hegel's later, distinctly less enthusiastic views of 'love'. Apart from Hegel's contemptuous dismissal of universal philanthropy, 'a shallow idea and an unnatural one' (*ETW*, 280, 246–7), this essay is finally an analysis of the failure and impotence of love; and perhaps also unconscious testament to Hegel's own deficient understanding of religious love, and the religion of love. As its concluding line makes clear: 'And it is its fate that church and state, worship and life, piety and virtue, spiritual and worldly action, can never dissolve into one' (*ETW*, 301, *Nohl*, 342). There is, and can be, no final holistic resolution in Christianity.

I conclude with significant citations which capture something of the spirit of the younger Hegel:

Others again, like Porphyry and Iamblichus, attempted to equip their gods with the wealth which human beings no longer possessed and then to conjure some of it back in the form of a gift. Apart from some earlier attempts, it has been reserved in the main to our epoch to vindicate at least in theory the human ownership of the treasures formerly squandered on heaven; but what age will have the strength to validate this right in practice and make itself its possessor? [*ETW*, 159; *GW*, 1, 372]

We see the concern with human power, and the slighting of gift. If others squandered human treasures on heaven, by contrast there is the momentousness of our age. (Hegel always seems to swell with significance when mentioning the age.) If realized in theory by some, who will have the daring to realize this momentousness in practice? We find a theory of religion as projection *avant la lettre* – and this not only in a theoretical but practical sense. A *project for the future* is being insinuated. This will be an *epochal task* to reclaim heaven for earth, divinity for man. Hegel was a left-wing post-Hegelian, like Feuerbach and Marx, before he became a 'Hegelian'.

Does all this become only more masked, more equivocal, perhaps more dishonest, in the older 'Hegel'? Or did he become 'Hegel', neither right nor left, neither theist nor atheist? Or was it that the more honest Hegel was forced to become, he was also forced to become more dishonest? Why? Because ultimately all transcendence must yield to the determinations of his (here still inchoate) holistic logic? Did Hegel ever cease to want to enact the core absolute faith of Enlightenment in reason?

'The fundamental error at the bottom of a church's entire system is that it ignores the rights pertaining to every faculty of the human mind, in particular to the chief of them, reason. Once the church's system ignores reason, it can be nothing save a system which despises man' (*ETW*, 143; *GW*, 1, 349). Hegel goes on to praise Kant by comparison, and the Greeks who 'had been brought to this point automatically by their sound intuition'. Our cast of characters, Kantianism, Greece, Christianity, will assume different guises in later works but what will not vary is a holistic logic that again and again relativizes transcendence as other.

Hegel's more ambitious project for the future is definitively put on the agenda. While Christianity is not necessarily positive (that is, heteronomous), the view

becomes glaringly positive if human nature is absolutely severed from the divine, if no mediation between the two is conceded except in one isolated individual, if all man's consciousness of the good and the divine is degraded to the dull and killing belief in a superior Being altogether alien to man. It is obvious that an examination of this question cannot be thoughtfully and thoroughly pursued without becoming in the end a metaphysical treatment of the relation of finite and the infinite.²⁸

A thoroughgoing reconstruction of the entire relation of finite and infinite, and the sense of the whole, has to be undertaken to do justice to the full dimensions of what is proposed. If we now turn to more systematic concerns, we cannot but wonder if fateful decisions have already been taken about what the shape of the whole, and Hegel's God of the whole, must be.

Notes

- 1 Letter to Schelling, April 16, 1795 (*Hegel: The Letters*, 35). See the text of 1795, *Die Transcendental Idee ... GW*, 1, 195–6, translated by Michael Hoffheimer, 'The Transcendental Idea of God' (1795) *CLIO*, 24: 4, 1995, 419–29. The eagerness of the trio, Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling for Kant gave way to hesitations, shadowed by Spinoza, about the personal moral God, but for Hegel the task of overcoming the givenness, externality and transcendence still remained, indeed the core commitment to holistic self-determination not only remains intact but becomes more and more speculatively entrenched.
- 2 On the emergence of philosophy of religion as an intellectual speciality in a time when intellectuals were less and less believers, see Desmond (2000b).
- 3 The famous passage on the starry sky is Kant (1915), 205, Kant (1956), 116. There is an almost exactly analogous passage in the *Critique of Judgment* (Kant (1913), 117, Kant (1928), 122, see also 115, 120 respectively) relative to the sublime. It is also worthy of note that the recent postmodern interest in the sublime, via the *Critique of*

Judgment, shows a significant silence on the last part of the book on the possibility of a theology.

- 4 See Desmond (1999a).
- 5 Kant's moralized sense of the whole is evident in the earlier writings of Fichte. See Fichte (1994), 142–54. This essay of 1798 ('Über den Grund unseres Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung') got him into trouble for atheism, and certainly seems to all but identify God and the moral world order. Can you have the moral order without God? For all the indignation of the earlier Fichte against his accusers, one suspects a kind of obtuseness to the objections of others that is excessively carried by the feeling of his own incontrovertible rightness. The later Fichte's approach to God may be something else. In Kant's case, one also wonders whether he would have been quite content to have had the moral world order without appeal even to his postulated God. It certainly would have more seamlessly closed the moral system on itself. It is to the credit of Kant's bad conscience that it was good enough not quite to consent to that closure. That bad conscience was like a wound that would not heal, and indeed could not be healed in terms of his system. There is no healing for radical evil within an entirely autonomous ethics, and this despite Kant's tortured effort in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*.
- 6 See Desmond (2000c)
- 7 Kant did not want to be associated with Spinozism. There is no room for the moral God beyond nature in Spinoza. While Hegel came to embrace the superiority of Christianity, as well as the modern forms of reason and self-determination, individual and social, he did not abrogate the dream of the unity of powers, or rather never gave up on the dream of the power of unity. Spinoza offered a sense of the whole, in the modern 'geometrical' form of mathematics. The second made him the atheist of the seventeenth century; the former made him the *Gott vertrunkene Mann* of the late eighteenth century. Though Spinoza was a Jew, he was an apostate from Jerusalem, and Athens in post-Cartesian form was his adopted homeland: an apostate son of Israel, an adoptive son of Elea, his God no longer the God beyond the whole but the God of the immanent whole. See Kant also in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (143): revelation seems to be a useful tool for something we could have discovered through our own powers, which when we discover it, there is really no further need for it: 'Such a religion, accordingly, can be *natural*, and at the same time *revealed*, when it is so constituted that men *could and ought to have discovered it* of themselves merely through the use of their reason, although they *would not* have come upon it so early ... once the religion thus introduced is here ... everyone can henceforth by himself and with his own reason convince himself of its truth ... For indeed the occurrence of such a supernatural revelation might subsequently be entirely forgotten without the slightest loss to that religion of comprehensibility, or of certainty, or of power human hearts'.
- 8 See Westphal (2000) on the younger Hegel's break with moral theism in a letter to Schelling. I think that it was not only the 'personal' character of such a God that caused problems for him, but also a 'beyondness', a transcendence defined in dualistic terms, and irreducible to the terms of an entirely immanent whole. See *Encyclopaedia* (§ 552) on ethical life and God.
- 9 See Vaught (1982). I have learned much from Carl Vaught, and not least from our conversations about the problems of transcendence and otherness in Hegel's thought.
- 10 See Desmond (2003); also Desmond (1986).
- 11 See Pinkard (2000), 516, 519, 520.
- 12 Bate (1963), 98.
- 13 I will mainly refer to the *Positivity* essay and the *Spirit of Christianity*. Much more might be said, both about them and some of the other smaller writings of his youth. But

see the works by Dickey (1987), Harris (1972), Lakeland (1984), Walker (1997); also the excellent collection, Wylllemans (1989).

- 14 A recurrent theme of the *Positivity* essay is the terrorizing of the imagination by religion, leading to the extremes of despair and madness. Hegel asks us to look at this *bewitched world (in eine bezauberten Welt)*, but, of course, he has the non-magical magic of reason to dispel the spell – as if it were certain reason lacked any temptation to terrorize the imagination; as if reason could not possibly cast its own dark(er) bewitchment; as if he slept to the bewitchment involved in the rational confidence that reason is free (can free) from bewitchment. One can appreciate Dostoevski's underground man: 'Oh! the babes, the pure innocent babes!' (see *ETW*, 137; also 147 where Hegel speaks of *Hexenkraft*. Do we also here sense Hegel's own nostalgia for a different bewitchment?)
- 15 But see, from 1803 the triangle of the trinity, Magee (2000). This hermetic symbol is a 'transgeometrical' triangle.
- 16 In *Earliest System Programme of German Idealism*, translated in Harris (1972), we find the stress between Greece, Christianity and Enlightenment. The text is named *Eine Ethik*, from its opening words, and some think the concern with morality defines the text as more likely Hegel's than either Schelling's or Hölderlin's. Ethical-social-political concerns were always central for Hegel. The text refers to the moral god; also nature as mechanical – we must go beyond this; also to Greece with respect to myth and the sensuous – this must be taken up. There is a reference to contemporary religion and its dead hand – this too must be transcended. Reason must be made sensuous, sense must be made rational. We need a new mythology of reason. The people and new priests (philosophers) must be brought together, in which neither is *ashamed* or *haughty*. Many of the themes of the text prefigure Marx and Nietzsche. The text is like a seed-bed: some seeds will be grown, others not. Or like a gene-base: some of the genes will develop, some mutate. The writer says: this last work will be the greatest work. There is an element of the hyperbolic about this. The world-historical future is breaking in. Hegel will moderate this later, not Marx and Nietzsche, as George Kline (1989) shows. The writer says: this (can) will be no greater work. This work mimics the being greater than which none can be conceived, as Anselm defines God. This greater than which none can be conceived is a work *projected in time*. The future of God in immanence is that task. While the writer refers to a higher spirit descending, what is this spirit? The spirit of humanistic work or divine participation, or both? But which God?
- 17 'The fate of the Jewish people is the fate of Macbeth who stepped out of nature itself, clung to alien Beings ...' *ETW*, 205. There is something grotesquely inappropriate about this comparison. *Macbeth* is a play about daring, evil daring, Macbeth's will to erotic sovereignty and collusion with the *equivocal powers of darkness*. Something about the sticky evil cannot be fitted into a naturalistic explanation, or a holistic immanence (Desmond, 2002). Incidentally, the concept of fate that Hegel later offers in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* to understand tragedy, especially *Antigone*, in terms of the clash of powers, each having right but only one sidedly, a one-sided-omen overcome through their fated downfall, recalls this earlier discussion. If what I say about sticky evil in *Macbeth* has truth, there is *more* at stake. See Hodgson (1987), O'Regan (1997) and Yovel (1998), on Hegel and the Jews.
- 18 When Hegel contrasts Socrates and Jesus in the *Positivity* essay, we meet the standard contrast of rational enlightenment and Jewish revelation. Hegel's discussion of the philosophical sect, as a group of like-minded friends, reminds one a little of Habermas: unconstrained debate, discussion, no coercion. The philosophical sect is not like a religious sect. We are reminded of a new priesthood of reason, but seemingly without

doctrines. In his study in contrast between Greece and Christianity, Hegel's sympathies seem here to lie with Socrates. In the company of Greek philosophers, the light thrown on Christianity, early and contemporary, is not flattering. We find also the contrast of necessary/universal truths (reason) and contingent historical happenings – the latter with respect to *miracles*, for Hegel side-shows to draw the gullible, but the real message is elsewhere in the moral. In the later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (LPR, 3, 368 – this is from the 1831 lectures; also LPR (1827), 458, 463), Jesus appears to receive a significantly higher appraisal than Socrates.

19 On this, see Desmond (1999b).

20 Nietzsche wanted a 'Roman Caesar with the soul of Christ' (Desmond, 1999b): Rome and Judea unified under Rome. Recall here Hegel's question: 'Is Judaea, then, the Teutons' fatherland?' (ETW, 149). Think of the Greeks as consummate erotic sovereigns, with reference to aesthetic wholeness, beauty, self-sufficiency, agonistic heroism and so on. Hegel's engagement with a form of the community of erotic sovereignty, and his insufficient resources to differentiate this from the community of agapeic service, explains also why his *Jungendschriften* might rather be entitled *Theological-Political Writings*. Hegel is primarily interested in political community as the worldly institution of freedom – and with religion as showing the riches or poverty of the overall cultural ethos which articulates the ideals, or ultimate values, of a particular people. On Hegel's absolute spirit and the theological-political, see Theunissen (1970).

21 In *The Spirit of Christianity* (ETW, 212 ff.; see also 99) Hegel speaks of the sermon on the mount as showing Jesus stripping the laws of their legality, as well as restoring human wholeness beyond the dualisms of Kantian duty. There is a sentence in the LPR (461) where Hegel briefly mentions the sermon on the mount, but it is no more than a mention, and his admiration of the 'colossal boldness' of the beatitudes seems more an astonished ejaculation than something that could be integrated into the discourse of Hegel's whole system. Indeed I think the opposite – their spirit is simply not to be found in his system, because they are beyond such a system, beyond any system, speculative or ethical. In 1831 (LPR, 461, n. 191) Hegel says: 'Words like these are among the greatest that have been ever uttered.' He goes on to praise Luther's translation of the Bible for putting 'a folk-book ... in the hands of the people', and criticizes Catholic lands as lacking this.

22 Thus today a suspicion of institutional religion. But how then hand on, or inherit a religious way of being, a tradition? Religion may address what is most intimate to the individual, but is not being religious a being in community, hence necessarily an involvement with others? 'Privatization' can go with an 'indeterminate' religiosity. How give public expression to this indeterminacy, without which, religion is a vanishing nebulousness, or nothing? Think of Jacques Derrida's (quasi-)anguish before determinacy. See ETW, 124–7 on Hegel's views of the relation of reformed Protestantism and Catholicism, and the right to determine one's own faith, with the political aspect of this (ETW, 121–4; 127–35).

23 See, for instance, Westphal (1992).

24 Here are some representative citations: from *The Spirit of Christianity*:

(ETW, 232, Nohl, 282–3): 'Opposition is the possibility of reunification ... It is in the fact that even the enemy is felt as life that there lies the possibility of reconciling fate ... This sensing of life, a sensing that finds itself again, is love, and in love fate is reconciled. Thus considered, the trespasser's deed is no fragment; the action which issues from life, from the whole, also reveals the whole.'

(ETW, 247, Nohl, 296): 'Love itself pronounces no imperative. It is no universal opposed to a particular, no unity of a concept, but a unity of spirit, of divinity. To love God is to feel one's self in the "all" of life, with no restrictions, in the infinite ... love is

a sensing of a life similar to one's own ... Only through love is the might of objectivity broken ... Love alone has no limits.'

(ETW, 265, *Nohl*, 312): 'When Jesus said, "The father is in me and I in the father ... I and the father are one," the Jews accused him of blasphemy ... Spirit alone recognizes spirit ... for faith is something divine and cannot make its home in a dunghill. The lion has no room in a nest, the infinite spirit none in a prison of a Jewish soul, the whole of life none in a withering leaf. The hill and the eye which sees it are object and subject, but between man and God, between spirit and spirit, there is no such cleft of objectivity and subjectivity; one is to the other only in that it recognizes the other; both are one.'

(ETW, 273, *Nohl*, 318): 'The culmination of faith, the return to the Godhead, whence man is born, closes the circle of man's development. Everything lives in the Godhead, every living thing is its child ... then it returns through associations to the original unity which now is developed, self-produced, and sensed as a unity. The child now knows God, i.e. the spirit of God is present in the child, issues from its restrictions, annuls the modification, and restores the whole. God, the Son, the Holy Spirit!'

(ETW, 278, *Nohl*, 322): 'In love man has found himself again in another.'

From the fragment on *Love*:

(ETW, 305, *Nohl*, 379): '... in love, life is present as a duplicate of itself and as a single and unified self. Here life has run through the circle of development from an immature to a completely mature unity: when the unity was immature, there still stood over against it the world, and the possibility of a cleavage between itself and the world; as development proceeded, reflection produced more and more oppositions (unified by satisfied impulses) until it set the whole of man's life in opposition [to objectivity]; finally, love completely destroys objectivity and thereby annuls and transcends reflection, deprives man's opposite of all foreign character, and discovers life itself without further defect. In love the separate does still remain, but as something united and no longer as something separate; life [in the subject] senses life [in the object].

Since love is a sensing of something living, lovers can be distinct only in so far as they are mortal ... In the lovers there is no matter, they are a living whole. To say that the lovers have an independence and a living principle peculiar to each of themselves means only that they may die ...'

See Walker (1997), 210, n. 23, where he notes the self-duplication and self-unification in Hegel's view of love, rightly reminding us of the etymology of speculation, and its echo of mirroring.

From *Fragment of a System*:

(ETW, 312): 'Life is the union of union and nonunion.'

- 25 Hegel does speak of the 'is' of fulfilment as a 'pleroma', but the meaning of this in an agapeic sense does not figure. When Hegel later talks about recognition, I think he is trying to get something closer to the third, though the language he has is overlaid with the second form, and hence the non-circular relativity in *philia* as not self-return, is not adequately described. I should also make the point that a circular erotics functions to render T3 in terms of an inclusively self-mediating form of T2. This must lead to a misdescription of T3, especially concerning the place of otherness in agapeic love.
- 26 Hegel's discussion of the last supper as a love feast is interesting (ETW, 248ff.). The subjective becomes objective, the objective becomes subject; inner devotion and feeling are made determinate in bread and wine as objectively there; and in the eating of these objects, their being is assimilated to subjectivity and melts away there. We find an interesting switch from the Christian Eucharist to the Greek god, Apollo and goddess,

Venus (*ETW*, 251–252). Is there a kind of wavering here? Or a breaking in of his sympathies for the Greeks, and beautiful nature? The refrain of beauty runs through the essay. Hegel's sympathies seem with the beauty of the Greek god. The Christian meal is incompletely religious, and is more a confusion of subjectivity and objectivity than their proper unification. Hence, as he says, there is always something of melancholy about it – the apostles, the 'friends' feel sorrow at the impending loss of Jesus; just as modern Christians are promised the divine but 'worship was incomplete' and the promise 'melts away in the mouth' (253). This is the sign of a promise not properly redeemed, not fully so, here and now, in immanence: it is put off, deferred to an elsewhere or a 'beyond'. For the younger Hegel this is a defect. Of course, the 'melting' may be a sign of the *passing* of true transcendence as other, and no defect as such.

- 27 It is important too that when Hegel names pure life, in one place he had put 'or pure self-consciousness' and then crossed that out (*ETW*, 254). Is this a kind of wavering, or rather, a not yet firm commitment to emphasis? Later we will see how the power of self-consciousness to be beyond dyadic relations of reflection helps Hegel think a triadic relativity that returns to unity with itself. A more articulate logos of the structure of relating seems more possible with self-consciousness, than with either life or love, where the risk is a collapse into formless indeterminacy.
- 28 *ETW*, 175–6, *Nohl*, 146: Arguing that even submission to authority from on high presupposes some *affinity* between the human and the divine, and a 'native goodness, nobility, and greatness in human nature', without which the preaching of Jesus would be like St. Anthony of Padua preaching to the fishes (see *ETW*, 72–3 also). The point is, and will be, a rejection of the infinite in either Pascal's or Kierkegaard's sense: the infinitely qualitative difference of God and finite beings. Also the rejection of revelation in any sense that insists on the qualitative difference of the divine and the human. This is very evident in *The Spirit of Christianity* – see *ETW*, 195–6; 255 (*Nohl*, 303–4); 295–7 (*Nohl*, 337–9).

Chapter 2

Philosophy Redoubling Religion: Intimacy, Agon and Counterfeit Reconciliations

Overcoming Asymmetrical Superiority and the Unhappy Consciousness

Most commentators grant that religion plays a major role in shaping the distinctive character of Hegel's mature philosophy. Religion and philosophy form an intimate twosome. Is there also an agon in the intimacy? Philosophy seems at times to double for religion. But how double? Hegel's claim is that his philosophical concept (*Begriff*) effects the rational *Aufhebung* of religious representation (*Vorstellung*). This conceptual doubling seems an intimate embrace, but what of an agon, perhaps even a disguised antagonism in it all, if the embrace repulses divine transcendence as other? Are there *asymmetries* between these two which, if not respected, can lead to counterfeit reconciliations? Does the doubling of the philosophical concept not also make us ask: what of the *reverse* relation, namely, how Hegel's concept of philosophy shapes *in advance* his interpretation of religion? What especially of the claim to *absoluteness* proffered for philosophy, relative to a similar claim to absoluteness made by religion? Can *two* such claims be sustained together? Or must the absolute double itself? And what kind of ultimate would a *self-doubling* absolute be?

With these questions we are already in the thick of Hegel's concept of God, but now more *systematic* considerations must come before us. Hegel's concept of God is unintelligible apart from his concept of thought, of which philosophy gives the absolute form. The question I want to pose is: if the relation between God and humans proves *asymmetrical*, do we hit a stumbling block to Hegel's effort to redouble religion in philosophy? By 'asymmetry' I mean that God's relation to finite creation might not be assimilable to the relation of finite creation to God. What if the mediation that goes from infinite to finite cannot be made homogeneously symmetrical with the mediation that goes from finite to infinite? What if these are not, can never be the *same* mediation, and not least because there is a plurality of intermediations not reducible to one self-mediation? Crucial consequences will follow for the Hegelian mediation between these two, as well as for philosophy's conceptual redoubling of religious ultimacy.

We can be concrete in our approaches while also being systematic. So I begin with some remarks on Hegel's unhappy consciousness (*das unglückliche Bewusstsein*), his name for *the* form of alienated consciousness. I am especially interested in this as redolent of religious perplexities about asymmetries between

transcendence and immanence. Then I will say something about cultus or worship as representing something of the religious ethos within which Hegel's idea of philosophizing was shaped. I turn then to reconciliation as surpassing those asymmetries said to alienate us. These, coupled with philosophy's surpassing of religious representation in absolute knowing, direct us subsequently to Hegel's speculative idea of God.

Hegel's figure of the unhappy consciousness is justifiably famous for its immense suggestiveness. With this figure we do not find ourselves in symmetrical equipoise with the divine 'beyond'. Hegel, at least initially, seems to grant the asymmetry, and hence pay his respects to being religious in that guise, but these respects are double-edged. One reason this figure is famous is that it prefigures much of the *suspicion* of religion in *post*-Hegelian culture. Religion, it is said, promises us an other world, somewhere over the rainbow, and we cannot see the live colours of the world in front of us, with its enticing invitation to spread our wings and spend our power here and now, on *this side*, the side of immanence. Have we not just heard the younger Hegel denouncing those who 'squander human treasures' on the heavens? Hegel, we saw, was a post-Hegelian before he became 'Hegel'. The unhappy consciousness, too, squanders its treasure on the heavens, and so looks both backwards and forwards.

But more importantly, the unhappy consciousness 'looks up'. Looking away from treasures on earth, it is unable to lay up treasures in heaven where no thief can break in, nor moth or rust consume (Luke 12:33). For Hegel, its 'looking up' defines its *inability* both here and yonder, sickening its relation to what is other here, and to what is absolute 'above' and 'beyond'. Some commentators identify it more neutrally with a transcendental possibility of self-consciousness, others see it in connection with historical formations of humanity, such as Jewish religion, or medieval Catholicism, or perhaps Romantic transformations of Kant's dualistic subject, divided between the phenomenal or noumenal. These debates are not our focus, but rather Hegel's philosophical strategy with asymmetrical relations with a superior other. Nor is my focus a philological exposition of the intricacies of this discussion, a task that has its justified place (see the hermeneutical interjection in my preface). I am concerned with what I believe haunts the entire discussion, though it may not always be made thematically explicit: *our relation to heteronomous otherness*. This is also why Hegel's figure prefigures how that relation will be understood by many thinkers after him, even those overtly hostile to his philosophical vision. In almost all instances, I believe it is the asymmetry of superior transcendence (T3) that is the rub.¹

Why? What makes the unhappy consciousness unhappy is that, in its thinking about itself and the ultimate, it cannot get over an asymmetry that always must exceed its own self-mediation, even as it seeks to mediate with what is ultimate. If that asymmetry cannot be outstripped, and if 'happiness' means some form of self-determining being, unhappiness *must* follow. And this is the case, even if self-determination is effected in and through the other. My question: what if the asymmetry communicates an otherness that cannot be converted into the medium of self-determination in and through the other? At the least, freedom as self-determination is called into account. What other freedom could there be? What are the options? Either self-determination, or the death of freedom in that heteronomy

noble Kant had laid to rest? Or a freedom *beyond* self-determination? But this seems a contradiction in terms, if freedom simply is self-determination. Thus our question of asymmetry brings back the antinomy of autonomy and transcendence and puts freedom as self-determination to the test. Hegel believed he can pass the test. Freedom will be self-determination, by dialectically reconfiguring its relation to the asymmetrical other. But this also means reconfiguring the *religious relation* as defined by the divine as an asymmetrical other.

Notice how the figure is set up by Hegel. The unhappy consciousness emerges in the *Phenomenology* after the equally famous master and slave dialectic, the struggle for recognition, as well as the figures of the Stoic and the Sceptic. In the struggle for recognition I seek to be recognized through another, as well as the other seeking to be recognized through me. The master insists on recognition from the slave, the slave seeks to be recognized by the master. The ethos of the struggle is *polemos* – it is agonistic, if not antagonist. There is obviously an initial asymmetry, even if in the struggle both sides seek to be recognized, in recognizing the other. The master is the one who first defines the asymmetry through power and domination. Were the asymmetry of the divine to be confined to this sense of superiority, we could hardly escape unstable alternations of submission and revolt, now between immanence and transcendence, now within immanent life itself. Somehow we must move beyond this destructive dialectic.²

Remember this struggle is not one for the satisfaction of animal desire. Finite desire is the desire of an animal, but we are dealing with *transfinite desire*. In that regard, the struggle is connected with religion, since only human beings have religion, animals not, as Hegel often reminds us, and because human desire is more than finite. Beyond biological survival, the struggle pertains to something beyond nature. One might say, it is sur-natural, or super-natural. We need not take this in any ‘otherworldly’ sense. Certainly here Hegel’s sense of spirit has to do with immanence, and finally, with nothing but immanence. The struggle may be termed a fight to the death, but if the master kills the slave, he also destroys the recognition he seeks. The struggle cannot kill the other, for then the other cannot give the recognition that is sought; both must live *beyond* the struggle. The presupposition of such a struggle giving way to recognition is the possibility of an *equalization* of some sort between the two sides. Hegel implies that *mutual recognition* can come out of this struggle, and perhaps even be beyond struggle, though how ‘beyond’ is the question. The possibility of an *affirmative asymmetry* is not even raised, with repercussions when applied to the religious relation.

You might say that the struggle shows the infinite possibility of *negation* – Hegel does think so. This is evident with the Stoic and the Sceptic: they have learned of this infinite negativity of human thought, and tasted deeply of its freedom *from* otherness: Stoic thought by its power to retreat into the immanence of thought itself, though it is then alienated from the outer otherness; Sceptical thought by its ability to negate all thoughts, all positions – the negative infinity of thinking that knows itself as the power to deconstruct every determinate position. These freedoms bring us to the point of a double alienation: an alienation between thought and external otherness (Stoicism) and an alienation between thought and itself (Scepticism), that is, between thought *qua* negative freedom and every determinate position posited as the truth. This double alienation is a loss of immediate certainty

but, nevertheless, it is for Hegel a gain: immanent thought, self-conscious humanity, comes to learn *its own restless infinity*.

At the convergence point of this double alienation, the unhappy consciousness appears, 'comes on the scene', an Hegelian phrase hiding a multitude of questions. The unhappy consciousness is the essence of the double alienation: alienated from otherness over against it, and alienated from itself: a double, that is, split figure of dualistic opposition. You might even say that Hegel shows here how the search for reciprocal recognition passes into extreme asymmetry and inequality; and that it must do so, to be true to itself. Yes, but we have to notice, overall, that this asymmetry, as it turns out, only *seems* to be between the unhappy consciousness and an *unsurpassable other*. In fact, the deeper truth is that it is *between it and itself*. In (mis)construing the other as superior to itself in a manner that can never be overcome, it condemns itself again and again to reinstate its own unhappiness, in the very attempt to alleviate it. Perhaps this might well be true in some instances, but one wonders if a kind of counterfeit doubling is operating here in our understanding of happiness, as one in which the asymmetry is supposedly overcome, the difference abrogated.

How does Hegel describe the situation of asymmetry that generates the unhappiness? Thus: the unhappy consciousness is the unity of these two extremes: master and slave in one; the alienated but universal power of Stoicism, the alienated but negating power of the sceptic, power potentially freeing from, purgative of, everything alien. The Stoic is the master, self-master of thinking as universal; the Sceptic is the negative power of the slave as worker who can look on all superiors as finally nothing different from themselves, for the superiors have been seen from close up, and these superiors are *just the same* as their supposed inferiors. There you have the switch mechanism for the equalization of all inequalities, the symmetrical reconfiguration of all asymmetries. The slave in the heart of the unhappy consciousness has seen, but first does not fully admit to itself, that it, in its inferiority, is *the same as all superior others*. It will be tempted to mistake its own identity with the superior by 'projecting' it into that 'higher', infinite otherness.

Remember that human self-transcendence (T2) in its own restless infinity is at stake, not a determinate desire to be assuaged univocally by this or that satisfaction. The absolute or universal is projected by the infinite restlessness into the 'beyond' (T3), but projected in the form of the alienation which the unhappy consciousness enacts on itself. Its *own internal self-division* is duplicated in the superior otherness, as a division between itself as the finite, and the other beyond as the infinite. And towards the latter it must move to assuage the agony of finitude. This assuaging of its own agony is the loss of its own intimacy with itself. For, of course, in this form of projection, the other beyond has been *fixed* as a 'beyond'. Hence the move towards it also casts the shadow *further away* from itself as it seeks to go beyond itself. It seeks to gain ground on the 'beyond', but the very act of gaining ground on it drives that 'beyond' again further away from it into the 'beyond'. This superior other in its asymmetry hence cannot be reached by any such seeking. Instead of assuaging the unhappiness, the seeking deepens it, doubles it, in the very act of seeming to assuage it. This 'happiness' generates, at the extreme, the complete *loss of intimacy with itself of human transcending*.

Notice in Hegel's discussion that there is, in fact, only *one power* in play here.³ This is the **unhappy** consciousness that is internally double, and hence multiple within itself. It is the one power, inwardly divided, that projects its own immanent division unto an other that, properly speaking, is no other at all, since without its projection of its own otherness, hypostatized as the absolutely unchangeable 'beyond', there would be nothing there. It has, so to say, *elevated itself onto the heights*, thinking to alleviate its misery on the lower slopes, but it is *itself* it has elevated, and *it* is really the height, but does not know it. (This is, in fact, one way Hegel defines religion: the *self-elevation* of the human to the divine (*ETW*, 311; *Nohl*, 347; *LPR*, 104–6, see 121, 162 ff.). And so its self-elevation here cannot but exacerbate the self-debasement of its own unhappiness. It is the unknowing agent of its own unhappy fate – perhaps understandably so, in terms of the origin of its search for itself out of the inferiority of the slave's position, that is, the origin in inequality and asymmetry. Is this unhappy consciousness not then caught in a *double bind*: its efforts to escape asymmetry reinstate asymmetry, its efforts to escape inequality retrench inequality, and this ever more radically within itself?

What is Hegel's response? Not only that the asymmetry has to be overcome, but that it has been. How overcome? From the side of the 'beyond', as much as from the side of unhappy immanence upwardly directing itself to an unchangeable 'beyond'. The way up, and the way down are said by Heraclitus to be 'the same', and Hegel in essence concurs. But how 'the same'? The 'beyond' must return from the 'beyond'. I think there is no proper explanation of this in the *Phenomenology*: there is a slide between considering consciousness, self-consciousness purely immanently, and the equivocal appeal to something 'coming on the scene' which shows the universal 'beyond' becoming concrete in the particular. This is especially evident in the penultimate part of the *Phenomenology* when the unhappy consciousness returns in connection with revealed religion. We wonder if all this slides over the difficulty of whether there is here an absolutely *immanent* development or not. This 'coming on the scene' is equivocally insinuated by Hegel in terms of the Christian story that God forsakes the 'beyond' and enters time in the particular figure of Jesus. The fullness of time, the emptying of transcendence into immanence, this is the (re)turn of the 'beyond', this is the 'turn about'. The move is ingenious, but is it a speculative sleight of hand? Now the pea is under the cup of eternity, now – the quick hand of dialectic having moved – the pea is under the cup of time, and, voila!, can be so unveiled. Are we sliding between two standpoints that cannot be said to be same: one, the immanent self-development of self-consciousness; the other, the ingression of the eternal in time?

We know Hegel's answer: this ingression instantiates Hegel's logic: the concept surpasses its initial indeterminate universality, shows itself to be self-particularizing, and realizes itself as full self-determination in the individual as the concrete universal. Variations of this absolutely basic structure of Hegel's thought will return again for us. Let me just say here that it shows Hegel putting Kant's transcendental subject to work in immanence: the 'transcendental subject' is not the noumenal as opposed to the phenomenal; rather the noumenal shows itself as phenomenal, and hence there is no noumenal beyond the phenomenal; the (dialectical) movement of the phenomenal is the self-concretion and self-showing of the noumenal. Otherwise put, immanence is the self-showing of transcendence, hence there is no transcendence

as other to immanence in its self-becoming and self-determination. Hegel's transmutation of the Kantian transcendental self, his concept, his God, none can be defined as a 'beyond' sought, but each is a self-determining, self-showing in immanence, and this immanence is the 'emptying out' of all transcendent 'beyonds'.

I put aside for the moment whether this emptying-out is divine 'kenosis' or mere evacuation. I mention, without fully taking up, the difficulty of running together what one might call the transcendental history of self-consciousness, and the historical appearance of living being concretizing the immanent life of God. The first claims to be a totally immanent self-development; the second makes reference to a transcendent, decisive communication to immanence of transcendence itself. We cannot slide easily between these two, in terms of transcendental immanence. If we do that, we risk producing a counterfeit double of the second, and perhaps also of the immanent life of the divine itself.

For now our question concerns the equalization and asymmetry. The 'turn about', as Hegel develops it, seeks a reciprocal equalization. How so? And is this objectionable? If so, why? And might it be possible to offer a different understanding of the religious consciousness of the superior, that in a way raises an unhappiness, but not as Hegel conceives it, for all human glory might be intimidated in this 'unhappiness'? I know Hegel might object: I, Hegel, simply represent the religious consciousness from within; I enact a rational fidelity to what it is for itself and in itself; I impose nothing on it which it does not show properly through itself. But how can we accept this if Hegel does reconfigure the asymmetry, as he claims it must be for the religious consciousness itself: that is, as something negative on the way to his positive answer? The asymmetry may have been airbrushed, not out of the figure of the unhappy consciousness, but out of the *telos* towards which it is said to be oriented. (Shortly I will claim we cannot airbrush the asymmetry out of *worship* itself.)

Hegel will not deny that there is more to being religious than the unhappy consciousness. This 'more' is beyond that figure. Hence we need to examine *implications*, as well as presuppositions. What the figure *implies* is defined by *what it seeks and fails to achieve*, namely, to surpass the asymmetry of putatively superior otherness. But this begs just the issue in question. Does it even make sense to talk of overcoming this asymmetry at all? And if it does, is this way of overcoming the asymmetry true to the finitude of the human being, in its negative guise as well as positive promise? Is it true to the possible 'descent' of the superior into finitude, that is, to the agape of the origin that becomes a service of the good of finitude itself. This would be a different 'kenosis'. Here the divine 'equalization' would be just the *enactment of the asymmetry of the hyperbolic good*. It would not be the reduction of the asymmetry to mutual determination, and holistic self-determination. The turn-around, the turn towards immanence, the 'emptying', would be the release of freedom beyond dualistic opposition, but also beyond dialectical self-determination.

And Hegel himself? The 'beyond' turns back: the 'way down' is in the recognition that a wrong understanding of the 'way up' infects consciousness with the unhappiness it thinks is its lot. Hegel's unhappy consciousness is **unhappy** because it thinks there is an *other* 'beyond', *always beyond*. If there is to be any happiness, it must see this 'beyond' as *its own other*. This is reminiscent of the logic of what

Kant calls *subreption*: I attribute to the other beyond what properly is attributable to myself. Religious subreption, so to say, would be to squander one's own earthly treasures on the heavens. The process could be described as dialectical self-mediation in and through the other. And the *same process holds true for the other as for me*. Each of us reveals the same process of dialectical self-mediation in and through its other. In this wise, for Hegel, I and other are the same, included holistically in this inclusive process of self-mediation through the other. This being known, or 'coming on the scene' for self-consciousness, we know 'the same' that includes both. The fuller truth is just the inclusive process of dialectical self-mediation in and through its own otherness.

I would put the matter differently. There is a kind of religious 'unhappiness' (I do not like this way of talking, but speak so in deference to Hegel), the source of which is *not* because one is seeking oneself in the other. *Not being released* from the circle of one's own self-mediation is the 'unhappiness'; and one can only be released from *that* through the gift of the agapeic other, and one's consent to what this solicits. If there is any truth to this suggestion, Hegel's unhappy consciousness is a distorted form of what is at play in religious restlessness. His version of what happiness is or ought to be is a deeper religious unhappiness, because it has reconfigured and counterfeited the relation to transcendence. Were we to overcome unhappiness in Hegel's terms our resulting happiness would only be masking the religious misery of its own delusion with self-determining immanence. Hegel's version of unhappiness is already a configuration of unhappiness in terms of his purported logic of what fulfilment must be. As the latter can be contested, so can the former. This contestation cannot be properly effected on Hegel's terms alone, for these are already set up in such a way that they will again and again gravitate back to the result Hegel seeks, the end his account serves: the speculative airbrushing out of the picture of transcendence as other.

Can one think of instances where the asymmetry of certain differences is profoundly positive? Yes. There is a thanksgiving which grants the excess generosity of divine transcendence, and the very asymmetry calls forth the ultimate gratitude. Could we understand what is deepest in thanks with the help of Hegel's unhappy consciousness? Doubtful. Or reverence? Hegel speaks of the worship of unhappy consciousness as vanishing up like music and incense. This is not meant as a compliment. The power above us causes our transcending to dissolve in empty indeterminacy. But how differently such music that ascends can be heard, such incense of heaven inhaled! Hegel seems to lack a feeling for this as lived, except perhaps beyond an abstract sympathy with the relation involved.

Think of Francis of Assisi: his was a love of the earth, he was ascetic yes, in agon with others perhaps such as those like the Cathars, too extreme yes, though later he sought leave of his body for his harshness, but the essential in all things was joy. His 'Canticle of the Sun' which also sings the glory of creation entails no diminution of God's transcendence; quite the opposite; nor is immanence a life of self-determination simply, but the enactment of a compassion and agapeic generosity for the helpless other. It is amazing the sense of joy – in nothing, in God. The bourgeois Hegel would perhaps call him rabble, a pauper, a mere bum who should get a job and not burden the public purse. This we surmise from Hegel's coarse antipathy to the evangelical vows. Francis rejected his father's mercantile ambitions,

and all that this prefigured of the burgeoning of the bourgeois world, everything Hegel held very dear. Nakedness, poverty: Hegel had little understanding of these things. Nor of a different poverty of philosophy – not poverty as an indigence of concepts, but poverty as an opening, an exposure to what precedes and exceeds determinable conceptualization: 'I am nothing'. This is not 'negativity' in Hegel's self-completing sense – negation as negating itself, through itself and constituting itself as affirmative. This is not the 'I am nothing' of a Francis.

Worship Surpassing Asymmetrical Mediation?

An admirer of Hegel might object: surely religion enters *positively* into the determination of Hegel's philosophy? Agreed. If religion is one of the most significant others for philosophy, if not the most significant, we must be very attentive to the *porosity* between the two, even if philosophy believes itself free from religious influences. Hegel was not any ordinary Enlightenment thinker who prided himself on freedom from religion as something simply to be left behind. Despite the harsh words in some of the early writings, his philosophical ambitions were always tandem to the claims of ultimacy of religion. Nothing less in philosophy would satisfy him. Philosophy must fulfil some of the exigencies articulated and met within religion itself. How do these extraordinary high ambitions reflect fidelity to the ultimacy claimed in religion, or do they put religion in the shade by, so to say, outdoing it conceptually?

Consider a statement we find early in Hegel, repeated in a number of contexts, and returning in the maturity of his lectures on the philosophy of religion in the 1820s: philosophy too is *Gottesdienst*.⁴ This might seem a mere matter of Hegel repeating himself, for he did have a tendency to rework material in a variety of guises, but there is more. I cite a very revealing account of cultus from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* of 1827:

In the cultus, on the contrary, God is on one side, I am on the other, and the determination is *the including, within my own self, of myself with God, the knowing of myself within God and of God within me*.

The cultus involves giving oneself this supreme, absolute enjoyment. There is feeling within it; I take part in it with my particular, subjective personality, knowing myself as this individual included in and with God, knowing myself within the truth (and I have my truth only in God), i.e., joining myself as myself in God together with myself. [*LPR*, 191]

This is a dense statement, for it condenses something essential about Hegel's views. Notice the 'giving oneself' the supreme, absolute enjoyment. Can we give ourselves this absolute enjoyment, or is there a more ultimate 'being given'? Notice how, even when I find myself in God, the inclusion of my being within God is *within my being with myself*. Not only 'giving oneself', and 'knowing myself', but note the concluding hyperbole of immanence to self 'joining myself as myself in God together with myself' – the 'self' of 'myself' that gives itself all this is surely an extraordinary self. It seems more extraordinary than any God 'on one side', not least because this self gives itself, within its own immanence, the absolute relation

between itself and the absolute (God). It articulates a complex relation of the self with itself in which it finds God in its own relation to itself, a relation that seems entirely immanent. Not marked by any transcendence beyond itself, immanent self-transcendence enfolds in itself ultimate transcendence.

Philosophy, Hegel intones, is continual *Gottesdienst*. This can be interpreted from different angles, some suggesting the concord of religion and philosophy, some insinuating a discord, even in the concord. For instance, we might read it as reflecting a kind of reverence of philosophy, a piety that, in a different register, puts us in mind of Heidegger's claim that questioning is the piety of thought. Those sympathetic to religion may seize on this: the *family relation* of philosophy and religion, and its benign affiliation, is to the fore. Philosophy, like worship, is humble before the ultimate. There have been even some who have pleaded for an open, a humble Hegelianism.⁵ Not many are convinced that Hegel would heed the plea. Why? Not because Hegel is entirely dissembling here, but this: the statement can *foreground philosophy*, as now essaying to do what religion has done hitherto. Doing it less well; as well; or better; or just differently? If less well, count Hegel out. If as well, Hegel might count himself out, if less quickly, for a parity between the two will not be his final preference. Just differently? No. This will satisfy a certain postmodern tolerance for difference, but Hegel is not thus tolerant of difference, just as difference. If what is absolute is here at stake, we cannot just have this. Better then? Hegel will dialectically equivocate: 'yes' and 'no'; 'no', in terms of the absolute 'content' shared between the two; 'yes', in terms of the superior 'form' of philosophy.

Whatever else now emerges, one must say that the relation of religion and philosophy, even if familial, is fraught with all the dangers of an agon. Let Hegel say: philosophy is worship as religion also is; but if an agon slumbers in this piety, worship as humble reverence may seem too fragile for thought; and thought may claim to enact more robustly what humble reverence seems merely to dream about: the union of man and God. And what then would philosophy as worship mean? Rather this: what religion claims for itself, it cannot claim for itself; indeed philosophy as worship makes *philosophy* the truer worship; it *outdoes* religion.

Of course, this point may be put more diplomatically. It will be said: Philosophy is a dialectical-speculative surpassing (*Aufhebung*) of religion which – do not worry – preserves everything essential of what it outdoes, I mean, surpasses. Philosophy takes the truth of what it does, and the object of religion, more seriously than religion itself, and – do not worry – this it does in a purer form of the love of truth, that subjects the credences of religion to rational evaluation. As Heidegger did not highlight enough when saying that questioning is the piety of thinking: there are a *variety of registers* in which questions can be posed. The selfsame question can be posed with aggression, as with love. And the questioning as such will look *exactly the same*, but one will risk hate, the other ask love. And the hatred can easily claim it is asking with love, if the challenge is put to it that its 'worship', or 'piety' lacks piety. In a word: we are ineluctably in the space of counterfeit doubles.

Philosophy may well be *Gottesdienst*, but if it is, this alone settles nothing definitely. For *Gottesdienst* is inseparable from the discipline of spirit that aids us in discerning the counterfeit doubles of God. The challenge for *religion* from

philosophy is whether the ultimate it adores is a false double. The challenge for *philosophy* from religion is whether it lacks that discernment, and makes of its reason its own counterfeit double of God. Such challenges will continue to disturb us, but we can find a mixture of all the above possibilities in Hegel: the family affiliation which knows that philosophy is intimately related to religion; the family agon in which a secret struggle for pre-eminence is not entirely transcended.

Worship implies communication between the human and the divine, hence both difference and relation: *difference*, maybe most overtly stressed in the ultimate dependence of the human on the divine, and in gratitude for, joy in, and dedication to a higher vocation; *relation* in that in prayer and ritual, separation is overcome in the mystery of communion between God and humankind. Is the difference absolute? No, since in worship it is qualified by the communication. Is the communication mutual? A good question, since in some religions worship seems to be our communication with God, more than God's communication with us. This, as we know, can be lived even in an instrumental mode, when the ritual itself becomes a way of seeking to command the communication of the divine power. Thus magic or prayer that *demand*s empowerment from the divine source.

Hegel's reflections on the cultus in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* are quite revealing on this score. Something of humanity's struggle for power over the conditions of life, especially natural conditions, is most evident in what for him are the most primitive religions of magic (among which he verges on numbering Buddhism).⁶ There is an important issue here: if the difference of the human and divine is equivocal, then the struggle for human freedom, enacted as our mastery of the elements of nature, as well as the self-mastery of the human spirit, cannot be unambiguously separated from the concept of God. In Hegel's scheme, this means that *God* (not just humanity alone) is involved in a process of *divine self-determination*, in being elevated above the spirit-lessness of nature, and in somehow coming to itself in and through the rational development of history, and perhaps too on the very slaughter-bench of history. Primitive cultus is more instrumental, developed cultus more self-determining, hence free. But there seems no way to get to the second without passing through the first. Question: if this is true, will the claim to have attained the second be quite as free of the ambiguities of the first as it seems? Or will its claim to freer self-determination hide its own equivocal implication in more instrumental uses of 'God', and not least if the difference of the human and the divine proves resistant to univocal stabilization? But if we lose the difference, in its proper form, do we sign the death sentence for genuine worship, even while finally claiming to attain the consummate worship of *divine-human self-determination*? Why cannot we quite shake off the worry that a fine spider-web of counterfeit doubles is being spun?

Philosophers have suggested (consult, for instance, Plato's *Euthyphro*): we need God, God does not need us; we pray to God, but God has no need of our prayer; prayer is perhaps good for our soul, but its ontological implications about the being of the divine are incoherent. This is even more clear in worship where the manipulations of the finite are central. Worship in a purer register might be said to free us of finite desire that seeks and grasps something from the other; to purify our sense of the divine as not needing anything from us, being a freer being; to purify the difference of its latent hostilities; to purify the communication of the sly

temptation to dominion. Hegel would agree: worship is the process of 'elevation' above finitude, both on our part, and in relation to the communication of the divine. If philosophy is *Gottesdienst*, it invokes freedom from the instrumental attitude, and its reducing of being to beings, their usefulness or serviceable disposability for us. There is a freer comportment at play. Philosophy too participates in this comportment.

Further again: 'elevation' is a reference to the *heights*; hence worship is inseparable from relation to the *superior* – the higher, the highest. Though we might bow down, we bow before the presence of the superior. What of this superior? The problem now gets harder. The problem gets harder because the balance of difference and relation becomes extraordinarily complex when one partner of the relation enjoys an absolute eminence with respect to the other. If God is *the superior* (than which none greater can be conceived), the relation has an *asymmetry* built into it: the higher as above the lower relates to the lower differently from the way the lower relates to the higher. This is enacted in the posture of worship itself: the worshipper bows or bends or genuflects or lies prostrate before the superior. This is equivocal, of course: it can be the posture of abjectness or abasement; it can also be the most fitting way to enact the reverence of adoration in relation to the superior. Bowing down enacts, grants the difference, but also opens itself to the relation and what is communicated from the superior other. How this is taken will depend on how the one and the other are taken. But whatever else will be at play, there will be this *essential asymmetry*, if one of the partners in the relation and difference is thus eminently superior.

If the superior is conceived despotically, the result will be a squashing heteronomy involved in worship. One remembers the remark of Kant to the effect that the most humiliating posture to be caught in is that of kneeling.⁷ In that case, we have not escaped the master/slave relation, and relations pervaded by instrumental mediations, of one using the other in an economy of dominating power and submissive obeisance. How then move to an asymmetry in which there is a freeing of the worshipper, if the essence of the relation entails the asymmetry? How can we conceive the asymmetry such that we deny neither the freedom of the worshipper, nor the superiority of the divine? What must the communication be between the divine and the human in this asymmetry, to allow us to understand the happening of such worship?

Clearly Hegel understands the conjunction of difference and relation in worship; understands also that the difference is not just traversed from the side of the human being supplicating the divine other as beyond, but traversed in terms of the communication of the divine itself: God is communicated to the worshipper across the difference. One might say there is a two-way or doubled mediating: from us to the divine; from the divine to us. Worship enacts the coming together in communication of the two in difference.

We might agree, but then how handle the asymmetry, if one side of the interplay is *constitutively superior* to the other side? I think Hegel had difficulties with this. For this superiority means that the mediation from one side is not, cannot be, the same as the mediation from the other, even though both might be termed 'mediations'. There is an irreducible plurality of 'mediations'. The doubling, or redoubling, of intermediations cannot be reduced to one mediation, not to one self-mediation.

And this irreducible plurality also applies to *form* in this respect: an asymmetrical superior power does not mediate with a lower power in the same way as that lower power mediates with itself, or with other beings on the same ontological level as itself. It might mediate through dominating power, if this is its nature; it might mediate through persuading love, if its nature were something other again. The former suggests God as unilateral master, the second as agapeic origin and indeed servant. I will come back to this, and Hegel's view is not defined by either of these two possibilities. But if I am not mistaken, Hegel has difficulties handling asymmetrical mediations, since he tends to see mediations either as self-mediations, or as mutual determinations, or else, and perhaps most comprehensively, as mutual determinations that serve the generation of a more inclusive self-determination. The fact is, in order to get this latter outcome of inclusive self-determination, the asymmetry in question here must be abrogated. But if we abrogate it in the case of worship, we do away with worship. Indeed it is not clear if the notions of elevation (so important for Hegel) or descent can then have any final meaning.

I will state the point generally. Hegel equalizes the plurality of mediations into an inclusive process of holistic self-mediation. There is a *way up* from the human: we seek the superior other, and so we are mediating with the divine as other, but in mediating with the divine as other, we are mediating with ourselves as othered. There is a *way down* from the divine: the divine is mediating with the finite creation as its other, but here too in mediating with this created other, the divine power is mediating with itself. Both the 'way up' and the 'way down' are two instances of the same: self-mediating in and through the owned other; and as the same, the difference of the two is abrogated, in that it is contained in the absolute immanent whole that more holistically is said to be simply mediating with itself through its own internal others, be they the human 'way up' to God or the divine 'way down' to man.

For Hegel, man and God, normally conceived, moving up, moving down, are not truly *conceived* as, in fact, they are to be, that is, both as included in the whole, each instantiating the immanent, speculative movement of the whole, namely, as absolute self-mediation in and through the other that is no other but its own other. In all of this, the asymmetry we noted in worship has appeared only to vanish. There are no final asymmetries at all. And even though the religious spirit might well insist on the persistence of asymmetry, this for Hegel no longer is decisive from the standpoint of the more inclusive whole. But, of course, that is just the issue. Are there asymmetries that throw a spanner in the works of this absolutely immanent self-mediating process? I think there are: asymmetries positive and negative.

Later I will come to evil as a kind of negative asymmetry, but can one differently think of worship and the asymmetry? Let me briefly mention an affirmative asymmetry entailed by the idea of God as the superior other, considered as the agapeic origin. This would be a way of speaking of God as the *hyperbolic* good. What follows seems to run counter to Hegel. Here, if there is a descent of the superior, it is not at all an 'equalization' that does away with difference. Rather the 'equalization' is paradoxically in the 'more' of a service of the finite in its good, and where the communication is the making available to the finite of the promise of the good. The asymmetry of the superior is always in the dimension of height, even

when it comes down to the inferior. Perhaps indeed it is most manifest in its height when it is there for the lowest of the low.

Hegel, I know, not infrequently resorts to Christian language. This is fine to use, but do his philosophical terms allow us to stay true to what is communicated? One must remain with reservations. Why? Because the hyperbolic communication gives good, but there is no absolution of asymmetry in this. The mediation of the finite and the infinite is not here the same as the mediation of the infinite and the finite. They are not interchangeable. It is not quite that the 'way up' and the 'way down' are not the same, though this is true in a sense; it is that the very nature of the communication in the relation across difference preserves the excess of the hyperbolic good, even when the hyperbolic good makes itself absolutely available in service of the good of the finite – what is below it, and below it as derived from the gift of the hyperbolic good itself. If there is an intermediation here, it can never be a symmetrical one. The elevation of worship is because the asymmetrical superior has communicated beyond asymmetry, but this very 'beyond' is the asymmetry again. For no finite being, even one with infinite promise like man, is capable of being this agape of the good. The asymmetry always remains, for it is constitutive of the very being of the finite, as created.

And note this asymmetry is not the opposite of communication and community: it is itself the communication of the ultimate community between the creature and the creator. Worship is simply the human being's accession to this community. This is why there is no shame in bowing down, either in body or in spirit. To the contrary: this bowing down which elevates is our being released into the free giving of this communication, this community.

If we return again to our citation of Hegel above on prayer, we will see that it *completely reverses* the point. It is not agapeic, it is not even erotic as released to the beloved, it is auto-erotic in coming back to itself through the other that is itself. And we look closely to see any line of difference between our self-elevation to God and God's communication from God's own being as other to us. (Indeed we look and have to squint very hard to see God's own strange self-elevation in and through us.) We cannot see any more the asymmetry of the hyperbolic God, and the 'more' of our being gifted from beyond ourself. I would claim that the point about asymmetry applies whether we are dealing with eros or agape, the 'way up' or the 'way down', asymmetry in terms of lack or in terms of surplus.

Perhaps the thought of the hyperbolic God will make some philosophers uneasy, so let me make the point in more human terms. Think of two people who claim to love each other. They might exclaim: I worship you; you worship me; we worship each other. Does this equalize the asymmetry, is there not a mutual symmetry? This may appear to be a mutual egoism, but if there is a trace of true worship in the love of the other, then there is always more. I explain. I say: I worship you, but by this I mean: You are *more* for me, to me, than I am to myself, or for myself. And when you say you worship me, you mean, I am more for you, to you, than you are to and for yourself. The 'more' appears on each side in its surplus and in its asymmetry. Call it a mutual asymmetry, if you will; but even so, the asymmetry still turns the relation of self-mediation through the other inside out. It reverses it, and shows something more than can be included in it. There is a being for the other, because the other is more to me for myself than I am to myself, for myself: more than I

could be for myself through self-mediation in and through the other. This love exceeds Hegel's way of thinking dialectically. It is not self-mediation through the other; it is not mutual self-mediating through each other; the 'more' and asymmetry disrupt and exceed these circuits of mediation; exceed more than mutual intermediation or mutual recognition even, if something remains unappropriated about the partners in communication. Hegel cannot account for this 'more'. His logic cannot even name it – silences it, even in the human relation, not to mention worship or the religious community. His understanding of community is silent on this – silences it. Even if you say that God is spirit in community, then the above asymmetry and 'more' have to be granted to make sense of that community. Hegel's understanding does not truly allow this.

Self-Reconciliation and Counterfeit Forgiveness

But is not this all unfair to Hegel who, above all else, is a philosopher of *reconciliation* (*Versöhnung*)? I hear him say: do not obsess with the unhappy consciousness – pass beyond it! Well said. And indeed immediately after the cited passage on cultus, Hegel goes on to say: 'The presupposition in the cultus is that the reconciliation of God with humanity is implicitly and explicitly consummated ...' (*LPR*, 191). But how pass beyond unhappiness, and in what form be reconciled? Reconciled by whom? Reconciled to what?

There is a passage in the later part of the *Phenomenology* which condenses the turning point, the turn about, and in which the unhappy consciousness reappears after the end of the Greek world:

These forms [of Greek religion], and on the other side, the world of the person and of law, as also the person as *thought* in Stoicism, and the unstable restlessness of the Sceptical consciousness, constitute the [audience or] periphery of shapes which stand impatiently expectant round the birthplace (*Geburtsstaate*) of spirit as it becomes self-consciousness [that is, round the manger at Bethlehem]. The grief and longing of the Unhappy Self-consciousness which permeates them all is their centre (*Mittelpunkt*) and the common birth-pang of its emergence – the simplicity of the pure Notion, which contains these forms as its moments. [Miller, *PS* 456–7]⁸

One could put a (quasi-)Christian interpretation on this, and what follows in Hegel's discussion, though it might strike some as a parody, even a grotesque mimicry of the nativity scene. Perhaps it has nothing to do with Christianity, beyond the mimicry? And yet, in Hegel's overall account, the transcendent 'beyond' enters into time, and all of time waited in expectancy of this immanent coming, at last here now with the fulfilment of time, and all estranging otherness between the human and divine is overcome in this the consummate reconciliation. Henceforth, it is the immanence of the eternal in time, and the completion of the destiny of that divine immanence, that is the task of the final age of God, the third epoch of *Geist*.

I believe it was Francis of Assisi who first created the nativity scene, with the manger, the animals, the shepherds, and so on, created with child-like wonder and as an expression of devotion, and in praise of divine solidarity with human

helplessness. If this is Hegel's rendition of that birth, it suggests more a kind of *parodia sacra*, bordering on intellectual kitsch. To the person in adoration the meaning of the baby in the manger points to an idiot wisdom, not a speculative system, or historicization of *Geist*. The child is a new creation, a given promise of life as good, a gift received.⁹ If the child is also the most helpless, this is not so because it fails to recognize the 'beyond' is its own other. Helplessness is its 'being nothing' without God. Astonishingly, God is there in this 'being nothing'. How there? Solidarity with helplessness shows the majesty of agapeic generosity. God's being given over to helplessness, as is the mortal creature, is the idiotic sign of divine solidarity. It is a partaking in the *passio essendi* of the mortal creature. Everything about this mortal *passio essendi*, this divine *compassio essendi*, speaks against the will to be *absolutely one with self*, against any *conatus essendi* that would absolve itself from otherness and thus absolutize itself.

Is this the celebrated Hegelian 'kenosis'? Rather, for Hegel, this idiocy of the divine in the child would be a mere undeveloped beginning to be overcome through the self-determination of historical *Geist*. World-historical importances interest Hegel. But these are always later. Take our being born: this is first a happening, an astonishing given. Is there a 'category' for 'being born' in Hegel's system, in any system? Is this original gift of being given to be not presupposed by all system? Is it not easily forgotten in the drive to complete a self-contained, because self-containing, system? If the divine too were 'born' in time, as helpless, would this too not be 'outside' system, as every being born? How can what is unborn be born, what is uncreated be created, be a creature? Is to be born always to be a creature? Moreover, how could 'being born' as helpless be the image of a higher majesty, or a height higher than worldly majesty? Only if the agapeic servant is higher than the erotic sovereignty. But this is not Hegel's real interest. This is not immediately evident in the *Phenomenology*, but if one takes his system, and other works into account, we see it. For instance, in the *Philosophy of Right*, the state provides a standard; in the *Philosophy of History*, the struggles of world history in the agons of the erotic sovereigns are the focal points, not the agapeic servants. While for Hegel there is something higher than world history in art, philosophy and religion, it is unclear how these are witnesses to the divine as transcendent, as other to world history, in history itself. And suppose there was, incomprehensibly, a 'being born' of the divine? The might indeed be an immanence, but would this nativity not exceed immanent categories, and especially if the excess of transcendence is shown in the majesty of helplessness, and the gift of the *passio essendi*? These are not questions Hegel asked, though one wished he had. In reading Hegel, one must always keep his picture of the whole before one. One must look up, from reading him.

Of course, for Hegel, reconciliation and *forgiveness* are inseparable, and there is a very revealing discussion of the latter at the end of the *Phenomenology*, where, as we recalled, the unhappy consciousness returns in the transition to religion. Hegel's discussion of forgiveness is frequently taken by Hegelians to underscore a doctrine of spirit as communal, and that his vision is transmoral, in the Kantian sense of 'moral'. There is undoubtedly truth to this, and we already see Hegel taking significant strides in that direction in *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*. Is the nature of community here free of significant equivocation? His discussion of forgiveness sometimes seems to imply that there are *two* consciousnesses that

finally break beyond their antagonism in a reconciling 'yea, yea'. Forgiveness gives one over to the other in a reconciling affirmation that constitutes community, and community as spirit. Yet a closer look at Hegel's language indicates (as we saw with the unhappy consciousness itself) a *one that has split itself into two opposite extremes*. And these extremes, thus set in opposition, present the hostile otherness that forgiveness must overcome. When the reconciling 'yea, yea' does come, the overcoming of the opposition of otherness is actually the return of the hostile extremes to their unity as one, as at one. That is, *the one has divided itself into hostile extremes*, and forgiveness is the return of the divided extremes to the one. Forgiveness is a kind of self-forgiving, it is a kind of self-absolution. The importance of pluralized otherness, the other to me as irreducibly other, even in forgiveness, is not strongly enough marked.

Is this happening here too? I think so. Why? Here is how it goes in Hegel: 'The reconciling *Yes*, in which the two "I"s let go their antithetical *existence*, is the *existence* of the "I" which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical with itself, and in its complete externalization and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself: it is God appearing in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowing' (*PhG*, 472: *PS*, § 671). It seems quite clear here that if there are two 'Is' in the reconciling 'yes', this double is not the last word but rather, to repeat Hegel's words 'the *existence* of the "I" which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical with itself, and in its complete externalization and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself'. And if this is 'God' appearing, it is also clear that the meaning of this is 'pure self-knowing'. As he later puts it: 'The self-knowing spirit is, in religion, immediately its own pure self-consciousness' (*PhG*, 474–475; *PS*, § 677).

Have we, in fact, been passed a counterfeit double of forgiveness? If we follow the movement here, forgiveness of or by the other seems to have been reduced to a kind of self-forgiving. But is this not to invert the truth: that, for self-forgiving to be possible, one must *already be forgiven*, be taken back into trust, by an other, an irreducibly other other, not oneself in otherness? Is not forgiveness also a reflection of the *passio essendi*? While to forgive is to do, are we not more deeply opened to a *passio*? I mean an undergoing that points to a '*being forgiven*', I the receipt of forgiveness from a source of goodness other than oneself. Forgiveness asks us to meditate on the bond between the one and the double. Do we need a *real two* for forgiveness? Otherwise, all forgiving is the self-forgiving of spirit. Hegel will say, yes, of course: the hand that wounds is the hand that heals. But is self-absolving real forgiving? Does Hegel's God need to forgive himself? This would be perfectly consistent with Hegel's overall view. If God is spirit, why does God need to forgive himself? If he needs to forgive himself, he must have also transgressed the good, and if so, been evil, and if so, what good is a God like this? We need to be forgiven, but a God that needs forgiveness thus would be unforgivable. True, I can forgive myself, but only because I am forgiven by another – and not just forgiven by myself in the form of otherness. For us to be forgiven, there must be a real forgiving other. There is no dialectical necessitation of forgiveness, it is a happening of the free gift of agape.

Let me emphasize that forgiveness is extremely interesting as a witness to an *asymmetrical* relation. One can forgive the other, without the other accepting the

forgiveness; and yet one forgives. Or one can be forgiven, and not accept it, not even ask for it, even execrate the one offering the forgiveness; and yet the forgiveness may be offered. The asymmetrical possibility means that, since the forgiveness is extended, the offer is in a dimension exceeding self-determination, and exceeding mutual determination. The offer makes available a release of accepting goodness, beyond these both. This does not mean that self-determination or mutual determination are unimportant. In fact, the hyperbolic release solicits a response, and in that sense, invites a mutual recognition, an acceptance that turns one towards the acceptance of the forgiving other. It also invites the one newly accepted in forgiveness to determine itself newly, that is, in the image of good that is released beyond itself. Forgiveness, in this guise as solicitation to good, points forward to a new self-determination that exceeds itself, self-determination that exceeds self-determination. Forgiveness is a witnessing to the surplus transcendence of goodness.¹⁰

One might object again on Hegel's behalf that he does acknowledge a *receiving* from the divine, a 'way down' from the ultimate. I agree, this seems true at one level of consideration. But one cannot avoid asking again about a certain speculative sameness or symmetry to the 'way down' and the 'way up'. Hegel is aware that the claim to community with God is not something religious people claim to effect through their own power, even if they aspire to that community, or for Hegel, unity. Were we to claim this from our side only, we risk the charge of merely imposing ourselves on the divine as other, and such imposition is no community. Hegel offers his interpretation of revelation, in the sense of a communication from the divine other towards the human. In the early *Spirit of Christianity* the immanence of faith in the inner divinity of the human essence makes him abjure revelation, as if from a strange or alien power. Spirit recognizes spirit. We are spirit, and so are modifications of the godhead (ETW, 229, Nohl, 280; see also 296, Nohl 338). 'Hence faith in the divine grows out of the divinity of the believer's own nature; only a modification of the Godhead can know the Godhead' (ETW, 265–6, Nohl, 312–13). In the later lectures on religion, there is a more explicit acknowledgment of reception from an 'external' source (LPR 394 ff.). The exact meaning of such a claim is unclear, however, since the overall drift of his perspective is to make this 'externality' less ultimate than the divine self-determination in its own otherness. This will become more evident when we look at his speculative and trinitarian conception of God.

In the language of the *Phenomenology*, a language repeated elsewhere in Hegel's doctrine of the concrete universal: it is not just that we as finite particulars seek the universal, being otherwise doomed to unsurpassable alienation from the whole. The *universal itself seeks its own* particularization; otherwise it is an empty and abstract universal. I determine myself to universality; the universal determines itself to particularity, and most completely so when the particular is not a thing but a living, spiritual, singular self. Particular self seeks universal self; the universal seeks singular selfhood. Our 'way up' is matched by the universal's self-particularization in the singular. This, for Hegel, is historically and religiously embodied in the figure of Jesus, but the meaning of this singular universality, or universal singularity, cannot be restricted to *this* individual. All humans are that universal singular, and so we are divine in the same sense as Jesus. The meaning of Jesus is not Jesus as singular but humanity as divine, humanity as the singular, the concrete universal, as

divine. Equally, God is not an alien strange power other to the human: the human is the being where God gives himself concrete embodiment, **embodiment** as spirit. And this more truly refers to humanity as a whole rather than to any restricted particular human being. Humanity as a whole is the singular, the concrete universal. The logic of the whole dictates this unity. Less than the whole, there is a difference not yet overcome, and hence an opposition that opposes itself to the unity of the whole with itself. Does not this suggest that it is universal humanity that is divine, that absolute *Geist* is the human spirit? No wonder August Comte, seemingly so antithetical to the spirit of Hegel, was attracted to things in Hegel!

Still one can press in Hegel's favor: is this not still to grant a *difference*, so to say, between our 'way up', and God's 'way down'? Does not Hegel then sidestep a common objection of religion against philosophy: that the self-determining power of reason substitutes itself for the revelation of the divine that breaks into the immanences of autonomous reason? In granting the 'way down', does not Hegel offer a philosophical olive branch to the hostile religious? Yes and no. Or should we say: beware speculative philosophers bearing dialectical gifts! The gift one is offered may not be quite the gift it seems. I mean: the 'way up' and the 'way down' seem to be distinguished, but it turns out that the logic of both ways is the same; in each way, the other is as much self-mediating as is the self. I mean: I as self mediate with the divine other, but in this mediation I also mediate with self through the divine other; from the other side, the divine other mediates with me, with humans, but in this mediation God mediates with itself through the human other. Each side mediates with itself in mediating with the other; for the other that each side mediates is, in truth, *its own other*, its own self in otherness. Each determines itself in and through the other that is its own otherness; and hence the two movements, the 'way up' and the 'way down' are the same. Each mediates with the other, but this is a self-mediation in and through the other, and hence the sameness of the two movements shows each as showing the same: the same is the absolute movement of mediating with self in mediating with the other as oneself. It is only the whole (of wholes) which effects this absolute mediation with itself through the otherness that is not outside or beyond itself but is altogether immanent within it.

When the Hegelian philosopher understands this, he also sees that it is defective even to speak of any 'way up' or any 'way down'. These are mere representational expressions of *the same absolute movement*, now from the side of the human, now from the side of the divine. The representation suggests a difference, but that is the defect of the representational form which sticks to an other before or beyond it. In truth, ultimately there is no 'way up' and no 'way down'. The mediation of the human with the divine, the mediation of the divine with the human, are two ways of expressing partially the self-mediation of the whole with itself through its own otherness. They express representationally the speculative truth of the God of the whole, beyond the God of ways. Properly, there is no way beyond for man; there is no 'beyond' to come into the world. In truth, the divine life is the always already at work energy of the whole mediating with itself in its own diverse forms of finite otherness. There is nothing beyond the whole, and no God beyond the whole.

I understand Hegel to say this: what happens in religion is that we are waking up to this immanent energy of the 'God' of the whole, as we are also doing in philosophy. But even this does not quite say it. It is the ('God' of the) whole waking

up to itself; it is the energy of the whole becoming itself as self-conscious, as self-knowing. 'God' is coming to know itself in the human being coming to know itself as being 'God'. That there is no difference is more ultimate than the representational insistence that there is a difference. Though Hegel will claim that this unity beyond difference will 'preserve' immanent difference, the fact remains that unity is more absolute than difference, and indeed from a more developed speculative standpoint all such talk of difference can only be fraught with equivocation that, putatively, speculative reason has put beneath or below itself, and below it not as outside it, but as immanently appropriated and transcended. Could you call this a mystical monism? Perhaps, but there is no 'mystery' here for reason, even if there is for understanding. If God is beyond the whole, the *unio mystica* with Hegel's 'God' means there is no God.

How Does Philosophical Thinking (Re-)double Religious Representation?

Worship, the unhappy consciousness, reconciliation, all offer testimony to the existential matrix in which our being religious takes form. Hegel is attentive to this, but it is the bond between religion and *thought* that is decisive. Hegel claims that religion, and especially Christianity as the consummate religion, is articulated in representational form, for here the importance of thought in relation to religion assumes its fullest expression. Due attention is paid to feeling, cultus, to community, and so on. But the bottom line is that thought is of the essence of religion. This is why humans alone have religion, animals not. But thought can manifest itself diversely. Here we find the pluralistic side of Hegel. Thought takes on different forms, and indeed as self-articulating it must take on different forms to fully realize itself. For Hegel, thought redoubles itself in forms other than pure thought. Forms of thought other than pure thought are *necessary* for him.¹¹

Religion is to be seen in this light. It too has its necessity, and hence the form in which it is articulated is not arbitrary. One can appreciate here how Hegel might be seen as defensive of religion, as something for itself, and not merely as a stepping-stone to a purely rationalistic goal. The necessity of thought reveals itself as process, as a self-becoming, and essential in the self-becoming is that thought concretizes itself in forms that are not purely conceptual, in that regard, in forms other to thought thinking itself. One might say: thought others itself in forms that are not pure thought. The representational form of religion is one such absolute redoubling in otherness of thought. Notice the many possibilities again. It is not that univocally pure thought must supersede these other forms, and hence univocally cast them in a negative light. This is the defect of Enlightenment understanding (*Verstand*) that is unable to recover the truth of religion in the form of its otherness. Hegel seeks a more dialectical and speculative, as opposed to univocal, reason. Reason, here *Vernunft*, the faculty of the unconditioned for Kant, knows itself in these others, and hence finds itself again there.

Religion is rational, though 'rational' here now takes on the concretized characteristics of the representational form.¹² Representation stands midway between more sensuous immediacy and pure thought, and yet it is thought.¹³ Philosophical reason can relate to the representations in a *double way*: constructively, hence

conservatively, in the sense of claiming to be faithful to what is of the essence of the representation itself; and critically, in being able to discriminate to what extent and degree thought, hence reason, is at work in the representation. Representation and reason are blood of the same blood, flesh of the same flesh, for this flesh and blood are of what Hegel calls spirit. Reason is not merely destructive in being critical, for critique releases the truth of representation, otherwise not freed fully into its own thought of itself.

On this basis, Hegel might claim that he is simply being true to the immanent exigence of religious representation itself. He is imposing nothing on it. He says that religion and philosophy, *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*, can both be forms in which the absolute content is expressed. This they share: the articulation of the absolute. When true philosophy understands the religious representation, it is understanding it as the form in which the absolute is expressed. Being true, for Hegel, is coincidence with the concept. Philosophy seeks the truth that is true to itself, seeks religion as true to itself, seeks to be true to religion as true to itself.

If truth here is truth to self, there are complications nevertheless. Put it thus: suppose religion is true to the absolute; but its truth, in being true to itself, is not fully true to itself, and hence it is not true to the absolute. In other words, the form of this truth to self is not fully true to self. I am reformulating the gist of Hegel's argument. For the form as *Vorstellung* contains the *Vor*: the truth proposed by thought is posited before it, hence as other to it. There is a *gap* between the truth and the truth as for it: God as the truth remains other than the truth for it, the *Vorstellung* itself; the *Vor* is the sign of this otherness. Consider further: the truth of the representation is that it makes manifest the divine; hence its truth is its *making immanent* that divine, since manifestation is immanent showing. Hegel believes representation *does* make the divine truth immanent in the representation itself; but if it does that, it does so in a form that still holds the truth *apart from itself*. In brief, the *Vor* again points to a transcendence of truth in the very immanence of truth. This transcendence is unavoidable, given the form of representation itself. This is a doubleness between the truth as immanent and the truth (beyond immanence) as for itself. Representation bridges the gap and does not bridge the gap. Hence, for Hegel, it is inherently equivocal and unstable.

If there is an acknowledgement of a doubleness here, *now* the worm begins to turn, and the previous positive evaluation of the representation moves in a different direction. It becomes something that now has to be more radically transcended. Why transcended? In order that the residue of the transcendent 'beyond' be entirely overcome; in order that the equivocity between the form and the content be surpassed; in order that the absolute unity of these two be attained. This Hegel thinks happens in his philosophical concept. In sum: Hegel can claim to be *both* affirmative and critical: affirmative because thought/reason is at work in the representation; critical in that the form of reason has here not attained its completely mediated unity with itself; and the sign of this incompleteness is the internal equivocity of the representation, and the still other transcendence that remains unappropriated by thought.

There are respects in which this analysis is very true to the inherent ambiguity of religious representation. But can that ambiguity be understood quite differently? Suppose the divine is shown in the representation. Suppose this is a kind of

immanence to the divine, otherwise the representation would be a merely empty image, an image of nothing. For an image to be true, the original must be shown in and through it, and hence be immanent. Such immanence is one aspect of the truth of the representation. But what if the character of the original is such that its immanence reveals it to be such that it *can never be made entirely immanent*? Were this so, every representation, even 'absolute representations', if there are such, would also be an *image of what exceeds representation*, and this in a sense quite other to Hegel's meaning. That is, 'absolute representation' would never be absolute. This would have to do with the excess of the divine, even when shown in immanence, and not just our failure. Quite the contrary, 'absolute representation' would show the impossibility of our ever being on a par with the excess of the divine, incarnated in the representation itself, as itself the incarnation of the divine. Think of Jesus thus: absolute representation as incarnation, but as thus the absolute, singular immanent sign that no immanence is absolutely exhaustive of God, or can be.

Hegel might seem to agree to some of this, but in passing along the inner lineaments of representation, he will pass over every rupture to immanence, and turn the passing over into a circle that returns to itself. He will take the dynamism of truth as the demand for more complete truth to self. But true to what 'self'? True to the divine 'self'? But if there is a hyperbolic excess to the divine 'self', then truth to self cannot be determined without remainder as the unity of form and content. In a sense, for this 'content' here, God, there is no form, and no form because it is in excess to form, and in excess also to the notion of self-formation in immanence.

We could perhaps wonder if, in the reserved mystery of the Godheadself, there is some kind of analogical self-formation. But even if we could say this, and even were it appropriate (a propriety to be deeply considered rather than taken for granted), this could not be mapped, one for one, on any logic of self-formation that we could determine. Precisely for us to determine it thus, would be to determine it just as finite, and hence to be untrue to the hyperbolic excess itself. If there is a gift of it, if the divine gives itself to finitude, it cannot simply be in these terms. For us to determine it thus, would be our failure to respect (to say nothing of reverence) its communication as free gift.

If I am right, then, Hegel reconfigures the truth of the religious representation in terms of his version of truth to self, which must be fully articulable by a logic of dialectical self-determination through its own otherness. (I do not forget the social or inter-subjective definition of this 'truth to self', but I will give more prominence to this in later discussion.) If, as I think, the doubleness of the representation suggests rather an *imagistic hyperbole* in the finite that communicates *between* finitude itself and God, then for that representation to be true to God, and to be true to itself, it must always keep open the space of difference between itself and God. There is no singular truth to 'self' that encompasses all the others, not even the seemingly most 'inclusive' social self-determination. This is of great importance for finite humans and philosophers who think *in the difference* between themselves and the divine. This 'difference between' is basic, notwithstanding all communication between the finite and the ultimate.

What is true plurally expresses itself, as even Hegel agrees, but the meaning of that pluralization is not a dialectical detour via manyness back to self-determining

truth to 'self'. Hegel reinstates a higher speculative univocity at the level of the concept, in so far as he claims to surpass the immanent equivocality of the religious representation. But this equivocality is saturated with more positive promise in the hyperbolic sense I have suggested. Dwelling with agapeic mindfulness in this saturated equivocality is the highest task of metaxological thinking which seeks to be true to the exceeding surplus of the absolute One; true to the original exceeding that is the creation of finitude as other to itself; true to the prodigious plurality in the finite between, in creation as given; true to the prodigious pluralism of showings of the exceeding One that is not mediating with itself in the finite between, and whose many showings are not reducible to the one form of self-manifestation, such as Hegel's dialectical self-mediation in and through its own otherness.

It has often been said that Hegel follows, in his own way, the traditional quest of *fides quaerens intellectum*, and this claim too is not without its truth. The issue hangs on the relation of *fides* and *intellectus*. Hegel will claim that faith itself has an inherent exigence to be understood, for after all, its essence is thought, and hence in being understood, it is just being brought into deeper intimacy with *its own truth*. Again this is not entirely untrue, but much depends on the nature of this truth and whether there is any truth here that is *owned*. Whether rather just the otherness of the divine truth to being owned is the truth of the representation, and indeed of the philosophical concept. Hegel claims to surpass *fides* into *intellectus* in which the essence of the former is preserved. But what if the *excess* of the former is to be 'preserved', rather than equalized, in the latter? This preservation could not be such that the philosophical thought could close the gap with itself in complete immanence. It could not be, as Hegel says of absolute knowing: the point where thought no longer needs to go beyond itself. Quite the opposite, in being true to the representation, it finds that there is no other task solicited from the representation than that thinking must exceed its own satisfaction with itself, and exceed itself into a new sense of mystery and darkness that is above the speculative concept.

In this case, *intellectus* does not speculatively surpass *fides*, but rather finds that, in dialogue with religion, or perhaps in the secret communication between thinking and the divine source, it has to seek beyond itself, for the origin and ground of its own *confidence* in reason itself. There is confidence in knowing because there is an ontological confidence, and this is a *con-fiding* from a source not itself the product of our thought. The confiding is a '*fides*' '*con*', a '*fidelity*' '*with*': our faithful thinking is '*with*' (*con*) what it does not produce through thinking itself. This we find then: not that philosophy speculatively surpasses religion; but that philosophy must surpass its speculative idealistic form, just in its being true to the excess of religion. If you think you have already surpassed religion, as do most post-Enlightenment thinkers, one will be incapable of hearing the further solicitation of transcendence here. I fear Hegel's hearing was not well enough attuned to this.¹⁴

Philosophy Beyond Religion: Being Unhappy With Absolute Knowing

I conclude this line of reflection with a brief remark on Hegel's absolute knowing. Hegel claims that the goal shown and attained in his *Phenomenology* is that form of

knowing where it no longer is impelled to *go beyond* itself. Absolute knowing can hence be seen as claiming to overcome, or at least be on a par with, the asymmetrical superiority of the divine which has occupied us. Philosophy's redoubling of religion is crucial for Hegel's absolute knowing. The previously mentioned discussion of forgiveness occurs on the threshold of the transition to religion, and religion is itself the middle between forgiveness and absolute knowing. An intriguing structure, if religion mediates between forgiveness and philosophy as absolute knowing. One might have expected that religious forgiveness, as the ultimate in saving, were above philosophy, but here any such religious anticipation is reversed. You could say forgiveness opens the ultimate relation *beyond morality*, and there we have religion and philosophy. Even were this so, one wonders how forgiveness is sublated into absolute knowing. God might be beyond forgiveness as the ultimate forgiver, but is a human being ever *beyond* forgiveness? Unless perhaps the human being has become God.

The question has to be posed, since it secretes huge repercussion for the implications of absolute knowing, and humanity as the double of God, counterfeit or true. Much of Hegel's equivocal discourse here serves to dampen down such concerns, especially if we are bewitched by the surface of profundity and seriousness that carries us along in the work itself. It is enough here to give an overview of some main points and questions about religion and absolute knowing.

Religion has to do with the self-consciousness of ethical substance (*PhG*, 473 ff.; *PS* § 672 ff.). In Hegel's complex unfolding, there are a *plurality of forms* of religion that spirit must pass through to attain its goal of no longer needing to go beyond itself. It is as if spirit has a last religious bacchanalia before passing into the austere sobriety of knowing at home with itself. Hegel calls the latter *Wissenschaft*, but it seems as if the threshold of this science is a wild orgy of divine madnesses. It is less this orgy that is Hegel's concern as the self-discovery of knowing, of *Geist* coming to itself, in the luxuriant promiscuity of a plurality of religious representations. Religious eros in paroxysm seeks the calm of post-coital knowledge of itself. Is the aftermath of its orgy its rest in God? Or its claim to wake up to itself, as no longer needing to go beyond itself, all disappointment with otherness finally damped down, all passion for the 'beyond' spent?

These forms of religion progress from the most primitive immediacy, through a variety of mediations between human and divine, to the consummated mediation which is the absolute self-mediation of the divine with itself in the human community that constitutes the Christian Church. These forms correspond broadly to the forms of religion that return in a fairly similar line of dialectical unfolding in the later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. All these complex details cannot be dwelt on here, but here is a broad overview.

First, the most immediate and undeveloped are those religions of nature, in which the distinction of nature and spirit has not been set forth, or if the distinction is suggested, not articulately adequately. Overall this corresponds to the immediacy of pantheisms; to the religious holism of the Orient in which the One tends to swamp all differences. Again I note the correspondence to the Symbolic form of art in Hegel's lectures on aesthetics. The sensuous otherness of nature overwhelms the spirit as it struggles to free itself from the encumbrances of externality and become more and more at home with itself.

Second, beyond natural immediacy is the religion most overtly showing aesthetic mediation. Here we find Hegel's discussion of Greek *Kunstreligion*. As I said before, this is not art but religion in the form of art. What is important here about 'art' is being brought to see the essential contribution of the *human being as artist*, as spiritually shaping into a new wholeness the given externality of nature. 'Spirit is an artist (*Künstler*)', Hegel explicitly says (*PhG*, 489; *PS*, 424). We encounter the express self-mediation of the human being in and through its harmonious engagement with the sensuous being of nature. We recall the importance of Greece, and here it finds its place for Hegel. The harmonious balance of sensuousness and spirit points to the classical form of art as *the Ideal*. This is the religion of beauty, Hegel's term, we recall from the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Greece is the epoch of humanity coming to know itself. The divine is immanently shaped in many forms, from statue, to hymn (via the oracle), to cult and the mysteries, to the festivals and games, and finally to the works of language, epic, tragic, comic. There is also a 'death of God' here, and the unhappy consciousness makes a brief appearance. This is the loss of the beautiful gods of Greece, and this is insinuated in relation to the great comedies of Aristophanes. Great Pan is dead. Hegel was aware of this first 'death of god' (like Nietzsche). But this is, in fact, the birth of *infinite subjectivity* seeking to be at home more truly with itself, knowing itself as the absolute *Wesen*. The absolute power of negativity revealed by comedy shows: the self is absolute *Wesen* (*PhG*, 521; *PS*, 453). This infinite subjectivity of humanity knows that there is nothing alien about the divine that is not at the mercy of itself and its potentially unlimited power to negate. When this absolute, absolving subjectivity 'comes on the scene', who now is the superior power? And where is the asymmetry of divine transcendence as other?¹⁵

The third form is called the revealed religion (*die offenbare Religion*). We come to Christianity. Here we recur to the issue of the double movement between humans and divine, and especially with respect to the inwardizing of the infinity in subjectivity. This corresponds to the Romantic form of art, where we can find exploration of this infinite inwardness, as well as its horror and anguish, presented for us by God on the cross. Hegel's suffering of the negative is not the *passio essendi* – it is the negative as the determinate negation that, in negating, determines itself, and thus is said to be affirmative. We are beyond the gods of beauty, but the manifesting is such that the notion of a 'beyond' and its hindering of the return to self is said to be overcome. Where is Judaism in the *Phenomenology*? There is no mention of it.¹⁶ Judaism might have slowed us down a little in relation to divine transcendence as other. But why should one go slow now, right at this, the threshold of absolute knowing? Have we not waited long enough already for crossing over into immanent knowing entirely at home with itself?

The immanence of God in community is what this religion, Christianity, shows. The point for Hegel is the immanence. The transcendent other that determined the unhappy consciousness to the fate of further unhappiness is finally overcome. Spirit is at home in the community, at home with *itself*. It is the self-knowing of the spirit in the community that is the religious form of absolute knowing. Self-knowing: now knowing no longer needs to go beyond itself, for there is no 'beyond' anymore. We have reached the goal of the whole process: absolute immanence in absolute self-knowing.

Why does Hegel's philosopher of 'absolute knowing', or his 'God' reminds one a little of Empedocles? Is it because Empedocles, perhaps more ostentatiously than Hegel, **announced** to the citizens of Acragas that he was no longer a man but a god (frag. 112), for his knowing had elevated him to the whole? He was originally a demi-god, a daimon, but because of an 'oracle of Necessity, an ancient decree of the gods', he had been exiled to multiplicity (ibid). As an exile he had been driven by strife (*eris*) and made to wander through all the elements: 'for already I have once **been** a boy and a girl, a bush and a bird and a dumb sea fish' (frag. 117). He has now returned to his original home with the gods and the original harmony of the whole. Beyond the struggle of eros and eris is the 'well-rounded sphere that exults in its circular solitude' (frag. 28). Empedocles could remember his previous incarnations and mentions Pythagoras's ability to remember as many as thirty previous lives (frag. 29). This comes a little short of the proclaimed power of Hegelian *Geist* and its *Erinnerung*, which claims, it seems, holistically to recollect *everything* that is essential, having, it seems, struggled through all essential forms in its coming to be fully itself, a coming to be through the whole that is both a return to the 'original' whole, and the self-constitution of the consummated whole. Unfortunately, that it has to remember means also it must have forgotten. And if it has forgotten, what is so absolute about the *Erinnerung*, either of the Hegelian philosopher of 'absolute knowing', or 'God'? A not inconsiderable vexation for a knowing that has first to strive to be absolute, or for a 'God' that has to alienate itself, even unto evil, and – dare one say it – even unto *its own* evil.

Who, then, is the 'self' of this absolute self-knowing? I note three possibilities. *One*: this singular human being – say Hegel, or whomever repeats the process. *Two*: humanity as a whole, the *Geist* that is the human *Geist*, and whose long travail through history has finally completed its odyssey and found itself: back from exile in otherness, be it transcendent above it, or external outside it in nature. *Three*: *Geist* or 'God' as the ultimate power that knows itself in the singular self, or humanity as a whole – 'God' that determines itself as 'GeistGod' in this self-knowing of itself in humanity.

I am afraid there is something to be said for all three possibilities, and Hegel does not always offer us the firm discriminations we seek. Not just one alone, or two or three alone; but somehow all three together. They must be run all together. (Other expressions of this 'all-being-run-together' will be evident in later discussions.)

It cannot be *just* the singular self; though without this absolute knowing being enacted, or happening, in a singular self, it is hard to know if it is possible for a *philosopher* to know it. And after all, Hegel must claim to know it, since he did write the *Phenomenology*. If I am not mistaken, Hegel was not born with absolute knowing. (I say nothing now about the essential singular role of Jesus in preparing for absolute knowing.)

It cannot be *just one* singular self, since there is a universal claim; and if universal, it cannot be absolute merely for Hegel, or another philosopher enacting it; the universal must concretize itself; and so absolute knowing seems a historical achievement of humanity as a whole, whose self-development now seems to reveal its implicit telos. Revelation makes explicit what was thus implicit: humanity's knowing of itself, and as power of absolute self-determination, without any reference

to any transcendent power. Humanity – let us now honor it with a capital H – Humanity: the immanent ‘God’.

But then the *third* option seems often insinuated by Hegel himself: the self-realization of ‘God’, and God not just as Humanity, since God has relevance to non-human nature also. Putting aside the difficulty of this reference to non-human nature, if (divine) spirit, or ‘GeistGod’ only comes to self-knowing in Humanity, we would here be dealing with something like the absolution of Godself in absolute knowing. This ‘God’ would seem to need to *redeem itself* in order to become absolutely self-determining. But if this absolute is really God, why does it need Humanity? Or is Humanity interchangeable with God, or substitutable? But if that is so, why talk about God at all. why not just settle for the second option? Hegel’s humanism would certainly be more evident were he just to say that.

Maybe this is a kind of *rational, ‘mystical’ humanism*: absolute humanism in which the representation ‘God’ really means Humanity, and this is understood at the level of the *Begriff*, not the level of the *Vorstellung*. For if the difference were not entirely overcome, then we would be back with a ‘beyond’, and absolute knowing would be more like a Sisyphean task which the Hegelian spirit no sooner accomplishes than it all falls apart again; and again spirit has to accomplish the absolute knowing in the travail of carrying the stone of otherness, humanity’s own otherness, once more to the summit of the mountain. But if *this* is absolute knowing, it seems to be a knowing that forgets, on reaching the mountain top, that it has been to the mountain before. How then does it preserve, conserve the essential? And if it does conserve everything essential, why then does it seem more like absolute forgetting than absolute remembering (*Erinnerung*), more like absolute stupidity than absolute knowing? If Humanity (née God) has to go through all that to be ‘God’, and if this is God’s absolute (self-)knowing, God help us.

If the ‘self’ of absolute self-knowing were Humanity, one might forgive it. But if it is ‘God’, it is unforgivable to be such a bumbler through history. Should we then forgive ‘God’? But then we have *condescendingly* reversed the asymmetry of the superior. Instead of God’s forgiveness saving Humanity, it is Humanity’s forgiveness saving ‘God’. We have taken pity on ‘God’. But what a pitiable god, this. Has humanity then become the double of God, claiming that other God to be the imposter absolute, the counterfeit double, and itself the true original? (Why, there Ludwig Feuerbach! What a surprise to meet you here – already – you were not supposed to have your entry on stage, not supposed to ‘come on the scene’, for another 25 years at least!) Or is it that Humanity has made itself the counterfeit double of God – with the philosophical advocates, namely, the master of the speculative system and his rebel sons, to vouch for its finally recognized identity?

I know there will be many Hegel sympathizers who will squirm at how irreverently I invoke ‘God’. They will squirm not because they have reverence for God, but because they will be more like those ugly sisters in Cinderella who will insist, against the plain size of their foot, that it must get into the glass slipper. Never mind the blood on the carpet, it must fit. Or they will prefer their Hegel ‘lite’, in which all this talk of God is stripped of any metaphysical or existential pathos, and made an inoffensive detour to humanity’s self-conception. (Humanity later reverts to modest humanity.) They will not like me speaking of God in relation to absolute knowing, and will try to give as bland an interpretation of it as possible. The orgy

of the religious before absolute knowing perhaps exorcises all desire for the divine from their philosophical eros, and now their eros is an eros-less eros. The *passio essendi* as an idiotic passion for God spent. Perhaps.

Apart from all that, perhaps because of all that, is there not this *flat thing* that so many have noticed, once finally being told now that knowing no longer needs to go beyond itself? I mean something like this. When we get to absolute knowing, there seems to be something anti-climactic. Are we then like the Roman legions of Titus entering the holy of holies and surprised to see it so empty (something Hegel attributes to Pompey in *Spirit of Christianity*¹⁷)? But is it so empty, or is it just the final wakening up that has been called for in all the previous *Gestalten*? There is no further form that calls us beyond immanence to transcendence, for transcendence is now immanent, and there is no more transcendence. The (pen)ultimate transcendence fixed in the representational form is dissolved when we realize that this form keeps us at a distance from the ultimate, our community with which it ostensibly celebrates. The full truth of the community can only be celebrated in the concept that comes home to itself through all the forms of representational otherness: absolute self-knowing.

But who again is the 'self' knowing itself? Thought thinking itself – a god, God for Aristotle, but here who or what is that god? Not the finite self. The finite self elevated to the absolute self? Or the absolute self finding itself known to itself in the singular self (such as Jesus)? The absolute self of the whole, no longer substance, but subject? *Geist*: 'The I that is We and the We that is I'. But who are the 'I' and the 'We' in absolute self-knowing? Do not the 'I' and the 'We' remain dark, and not at all transparent to themselves? Absolute self-knowing? Call the 'I' that is 'We', the 'We' that is 'I', God if you will, and you may say that for Hegel it is the community which is the presence of God, the existing God. Hegel: 'Self-recognition in absolute otherness'. But does not the first stress fall on the *self-recognition*, and the last stress too, for the 'absolute otherness' here is neither absolute nor absolutely other, since it serves the mediation of the *self-recognition*? And again: what 'self'?

You may say there is no 'monism' here, but is this quite so? Is it not the one power of *Geist* that manifests itself in the community, in the plurality, indeed in all the forms prior to the absolute form? Let the 'mono' be dialectically qualified, speculatively qualified, intersubjectively qualified, if you will. The *inter* of the intersubjective qualification is a certain kind of between. But what kind of a between? It is not what I call a metaxological between. Is it between God and god? Or it between man and God? Or between God and god through man? Or if between God and man, is it between man and himself, as the immanently worldly singularization of the ultimate power? All along the line destiny effects its mission: the equivocal blurring of the difference (baptized as a dialectical *Aufhebung*) of man and God. Why? Because Hegel will have no truck with a transcendent God, except to grant that, yes, men have thought so, but if so, done so, because they have not yet attained the truth, even if also their superseded views are rewarded in their partiality for contributing to this, the final truth.

Why at this culmination are we left strangely hungry? Or empty? Or unhappy? We have been promised that at least we will be beyond the unhappy consciousness. But if one were happy with this anticlimactic climax, what would that say about the highest happiness?¹⁸ And do not deny that many of us are very unhappy with this

highest happiness. No amount of preaching that we *should* be happy will convert us. If Hegel has to preach to us, he has not given us the ladder to the absolute he promised. Or if he has given us the ladder, the absolute is not quite what we thought it was promised to be. Suppose we have followed all the way, suppose we have opened ourselves to the 'Golgotha of spirit', suppose even as good philologists we have repeated the ascent again and again, and we think we have arrived, in the terms Hegel gives us. But having arrived, do we experience the promised parousia? We do not. Is that our fault? And if the Hegelian preaches to us that we *should* so grant the absolute self-knowing, surely the preaching itself is sign enough of some failure at this supreme point of claimed success.

And what is so *absolute* about absolute knowing? Hegelians lite will parse it, so that any offense in the word 'absolute' will be softened or dissolved. But if it is so inoffensive why bother at all? Why go through that odyssey to be left with an inoffensive little conclusion that thought knows itself? Hegel has set us up for something big; but he ends with a whimper and not a bang – certainly if you take the liberal humanistic readings as true. Hegel tells us about the manifest 'God' as the spirit immanent in community. But we are quickly reassured by this liberal humanist spin, don't worry, there is nothing big about this, it is all quite compatible with our little humanity; it is nothing but a metaphor for humanity's self-understanding. Why then we need, or Hegel needs, any florid theological, metaphysical language is beyond me. But perhaps there is some truth to it, since the blurring of difference just allows this anti-climactic climax, parsed so reassuringly by the scholarly spin of the humanistic lites. But then, for wilder religious madmen, Hegel will be a false prophet. Or a high priest who has brought us to the climactic moment of philosophical consecration, for philosophy too is *Gottesdienst*, but after the consecration, the high priest deflates the holy moment, by telling us that after all the absolute is not such a big deal, for after all, are not we and the absolute one?

What if there is a different poverty of philosophy: one where philosophy comes closer to a fulfilment, not at the point where knowing no longer goes beyond itself, but just the opposite – where knowing is called to an exodus beyond itself, above itself, into the darkness of the divine?

Notes

- 1 One might think of Feuerbach, or Marx, or Nietzsche, or Freud, or Sartre. Think of Marx prefacing his doctoral dissertation with the words of Prometheus from Aeschylus: 'In one word, I hate all the gods.' Nietzsche: 'No God above me, nor no man either!' Asymmetrical superiority is the rub.
- 2 See Desmond (1992), 104ff. for further discussion.
- 3 *PS*, 126: 'In Stoicism, self-consciousness is the simple freedom of itself. In Scepticism, this freedom becomes a reality, negates the other side of determinate existence, but really duplicates *itself*, and now knows itself to be a duality. Consequently, the duplication which formerly was divided between the two individuals, the lord and the bondsman, is now lodged in one. The duplication of self-consciousness within itself, which is essential in the Notion of Spirit, is thus here before us, but not yet in its unity: the *Unhappy Consciousness* is the consciousness of self as a dual-natured, merely self-contradictory being.

This *unhappy, inwardly disrupted* consciousness, since its essentially contradictory nature is for it a *single* consciousness, must for ever have present in the one consciousness the other also; and thus it is driven out of each in turn in the very moment when it has imagined it has successfully attained to a peaceful unity with the other. Its true return into itself, or its reconciliation with itself will, however, display the Notion of Spirit that has become a living Spirit, and has achieved an actual existence, because it already possesses as a single undivided consciousness a dual nature. The Unhappy Consciousness is the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and itself is both, and the unity of both is also its essential nature. But it is not as yet explicitly aware that this is its essential nature, or that it is the unity of both.'

- 4 *LPR*, 194: 'To that extent philosophy [too] is a continual cultus ...' I have offered an extensive discussion of this in Desmond (1992), Chapter 2, which I do not repeat here. The angle of consideration is somewhat different, though familiarity with that earlier discussion would help fill out much that space forbids me from referring to here.
- 5 See Jan van der Veken, 'A Plea for an Open, Humble Hegelianism', in Lucas (1986).
- 6 In *LPR* 2, 1824 lectures, 303–5, Buddhism is in 'Immediate/Natural Religion', the last subsection of the religion of magic, and called the religion of being – within-self. See Hodgson's note p. 36. In *LPR*, 2, 1827 lectures, 562–3, Buddhism is still in Immediate Religion and the religion of being-within-self but is no longer in the religion of magic section. In *LPR*, 2, 1831 lectures, see 735 for Buddhism as the Religion of annihilation. Hodgson, 73 points out that Buddhism seems to be separated from natural religion as a category.
- 7 In *Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, in Kant (1983), 99, in the section 'Concerning Servility', he says: 'Kneeling down or grovelling on the ground, even to express your reverence for heavenly things, is contrary to human dignity.'
- 8 In Miller's translation here, there are interpellations in brackets, especially the one referring to Bethlehem, which raise questions. Here is the German: 'Diese Formem. und auf der andern Seite die *Welt* der *Person* und des Rechts, die verwüstende Wildheit der freigelassenen Elemente des Inhalts, ebenso die *gedachte* Person des Stoicismus und die haltlose Unruhe des skeptischen Bewusstseins, machen die Peripherie der Gestalten aus, welche erwartend und drängend um die Geburtsstätte des als Selbstbewusstsein werdenden Geistes umherstehen; der alle durchdringende Schmerz und Sehnsucht des unglücklichen Selbstbewusstseins ist ihr Mittelpunkt und das gemeinschaftliche Beburtswehe seines Hervorgangs. – die Einfachheit des reinen Begriffs, der jene Gestalten als seine Momente enthaalt' (*PS*. 525).
- 9 In *ETW* 307–8 Hegel discusses the child as the outcome of the love of the couple: it is the third that is their expressed union; but the emphasis is on the child as the third that allows the closure of the circle in a return to beginnings: the child completes the circuit of holistic immanence; it is not the gift of the absolutely new.
- 10 I will say something more in chapter six about evil, forgiveness and our asymmetrical relation to God: if God forgives sin, there is a surplus otherness in a negative sense to the evil that holds one in bondage, and a surplus otherness in an affirmative sense to the good that releases from that bondage. It is because of this asymmetrical relation that the issue of evil is not a 'problem' that has a determinate solution but a mystery that is in the dimension of the hyperbolic. Without univocal solution, it can only be 'solved' by being 'absolved', that is, in the offer that saves. A mystery calls to salvation, not system: this is not just a knowing but a metanoia of one's whole being.
- 11 Dow Magnus (2001) exploits this in her helpful book, but pulls her punches on the question of otherness, perhaps not seeing that there are punches that could be pulled with respect to the issue considered here.
- 12 See Jaeschke (1986, 1990).

- 13 A still outstanding study of this issue is Clark (1971). See also Ricoeur (1982). On the issue of *Vorstellung* before mediation by thought and after such mediation, and incorporating such thought, see Cyril O'Regan's (2002) important discussion of Harris (1997). I think the problem is somewhat other: not only whether thought is incipient in representation, surely it is, not only that representation is and can come to be mediated by thought, for surely it can, but first the overdetermination of what is incipient at source in representation, as a possible divine communication, then second the constitutive ambiguity that persists even despite the mediation of thought, and then further again, and third, whether there is an entirely different mediation in which this overdetermined incipience of communication, and its constitutive ambiguity (equivocity), call thought itself *beyond* its own self-determining, self-mediating form. I am not convinced that the first two are satisfactorily handled by Hegel, and certainly the third is not, and the first two are not satisfactorily handled just because Hegel has no 'notion' what this third might be.
- 14 See Desmond (1992), Chapter 3, for some points about reading the doubleness differently, without falling back into a merely mad equivocity in which a different atheism comes, say Nietzsche's atheism.
- 15 This negativity also appears in philosophical form. Thus Socrates shows the power of thought to deconstruct all traditional religious images of the divine. Thought shows the new higher, more universal and more inward 'god'. We find it said in the *Philebus*: philosophers elevate themselves to God in elevating their thought. This is said more equivocally in Socrates, for whom it is unequivocally clear that we are not God. Any such equivocity is dialectically sublated in Hegelian speculation, and we are more truly 'God'.
- 16 Yovel (1998) considers why in *The Dark Riddle*.
- 17 See Flavius Joseph (1982), 402. Hegel refers to this and Pompey in *ETW*, 192.
- 18 Somewhere Chesterton said something to this effect: when human beings stop believing in God, they do not stop believing, but are more likely to believe in anything at all.

Chapter 3

Beyond Double Thinking: Hegel's Speculative God

Beyond Double Thinking

Hegel's speculative concept of God is a piece with his philosophy as a whole, and with his understanding of the nature of thinking, as epitomized by philosophy. A repeated claim in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is the essential connection of thinking and religion. Even if religion is penultimate to (philosophical) thinking as absolute knowing, nevertheless, thinking, and thinking on thinking, is indispensable to knowing the truth of religion and the nature of God. Religion may be 'exoteric', philosophy 'esoteric' [Enz, § 573], but the essence is thinking. We must then look at what Hegel means by thinking, ordinary and speculative. What will come into view is a *triadic logic* which purports to overreach the more common dyadic logic of common sense and dualistic philosophies. This will also shed light on Hegel's attitude to the traditional proofs of God's existence. Their traditional form is that of the understanding (*Verstand*), and Kant, he says, rightly sees their defect in that form, but they must be speculatively transformed in terms of reason (*Vernunft*) rather than simply discarded. Hegel displays both Kant's inescapable influence, and the project of reversing Kant, most notably with respect to the ontological argument. Decisive here is speculative reason beyond dualism.

Hegel's triadic logic also bears on a trinitarian view of God. The Christian trinity is the representational form of what Hegel articulates in terms of his speculative logic. We will come to the trinitarian claims, but the view generally looks something like this. Speculative logic articulates an original unity/universal that differentiates itself into subject (S) and object (O). Further, in relating them (S and O) to each other, the unity/universal relates them to itself. Moreover, it relates to *itself* in relating to them, for they, after all, are *its own* differentiations. And so we arrive at a triadic self-relating that is mediated to itself in its own immanent self-othering. This triadic self-relating offers us the logic to think the immanent self-differentiation and self-mediation of God as trinity: 'For thinking means that, in the other, one meets with oneself' (Enz, § 159).

The structure of this, *qua* structure, is the same as the structure of self-consciousness: not the dyadic subject-object relation (S-O); but the triadic self-relation which includes in itself the dyadic subject-object relation: S(S-O). This is very schematic, I know, and more light must be thrown on it. And, of course, structure *qua* structure is still just structure. Concretely it must take form, structure itself in diverse manners, and not least because Hegel's view of God, of spirit, of actuality, is dynamic through and through. Structuring *qua* dynamic process is

more ultimate than structure, as having already taken form and hence fixed itself. Nevertheless, we find in Hegel a recurrent structuring of the above form which informs all the concretions taking actuality in the more normal sense. We are not dealing, as some postmoderns seems to want, just with process *qua* process as sheer flux. Heraclitus says 'It runs', but Hegel would agree with Heraclitus when he says: *the logos runs* through all. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, (Hegel, 1892–96, I, 279) he says that in his *Logic* there is hardly a proposition of Heraclitus that he has not adopted. Heraclitus says the thunderbolt steers all that is. But if the logos means an 'all-being-run-together', how do we avoid what might be called 'fluxgibberish'? For Hegel, this, so to say, dynamis of the logos shows the ultimate importance of such a structuring *qua* structuring, since as dynamic logos, it reveals the logic of the actual, and the absolute.

But we have already started too high, or too deep, in immediately speaking of the ultimate. This is to work, as it were, from the top down. Admittedly in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel often does work from the top down, beginning with the primordial unity.¹ But we can and must also start from where we are in the middle, and trace Hegel's path to this seeming height, or depth. Indeed Hegel prides himself on also supplying us (mostly notably in the *Phenomenology*) with the means to pass along a way from down below to the top, from division to unity. While we have already looked at some aspects of this, our focus now concerns Hegel's claims to move beyond double thinking.

Ordinary Double Thinking and the Speculative Triad

For many the word 'speculation' has a negative connotation. It implies that on the basis of slender evidence here now I venture conjectures as to a state of affairs not now directly given. Speculation is in the mode of surmise, or hazarding, or wondering about what does not now appear, but perhaps may appear, or that, even though not manifest, yet is thought of in a hypothetical mode, or perhaps, *à la* Kant, in the mode of *als ob*. Obviously with such a view of speculation, no necessity or certainty can be claimed. A gap remains between the evident and the surmised, a gap which the evidence cannot completely overcome, hence the status of any claim we make about the surmised remains open to question, to doubt, to uncertainty.

Of course, we could turn around our view of that gap, and see something more affirmative concerning the form of its middle space. Thus: when we wonder in this middle gap, there is a venture of knowing in the uncertain space between humans and God, and hence speculation always carries in itself the ambiguity of that middle condition which it can never completely dispel. If the surmised is God, obviously any claims to know God must be constitutively marked by openness and uncertainty, if not equivocity. If there is an evaluation of the high value of speculation in the western tradition, often it has more to do with the pre-eminence of the 'object' of wonder rather than the quality of certainty our cognition can be said to possess. Aquinas, echoing Aristotle: a slender knowledge of higher things is more worthy than a more certain knowledge of lower things (*ST*, 1a, 1, 5; also *ST*, I-II q. 102, a. b ad 1). This reflects an acknowledgment of the finitude of human knowing, even when dealing with the transfinite.

There is equally an opposite evaluation with respect to this gap showing the intermediacy of finitude. This is the posture of a common-sense finitude that insists on itself as the measure of knowing, knowing what it can, and leaving what it cannot for the birds, that is, dismissing any surmise of what might be beyond itself. This is the Thracian maid as anti-metaphysician. The slenderness of the knowing of higher things justifies jest and mockery of even the attempt to know such airy things.

Hegel will have none of these positions. And this, not only because of the deficit of certainty, but because of the failure to note what he claims is the mode of thinking proper to God. The failure stems from lack of thinking on thinking, hence lack of proper understanding of the nature of speculative thinking, the acme of thinking as such. So he says.

Hegel grants that thinking is conceived in terms of a difference between the act of thinking and the object thought. If I think about the sun, my thinking is my thought, but the object thought is not mine; and between what is mine and not mine there is a difference. How we relate to this difference is all important. Philosophers of a more realistic cast of mind, and persons of ordinary common sense, will insist that the difference stands as something irreducible. Philosophers of more idealist bent will demur and claim that there are further considerations that force us to revise this initial entrenchment of given difference.

The argument might be like this: when I think of something, the thinking is *of* that something, and hence the difference is not absolute; for if it were, there would be no thinking *about*, hence no thinking. So we may say that thinking overcomes the difference; certainly so in thought, in that the thought of the object, the sun, as 'not mine', is within thought, when thought, and so is 'mine'. Thinking about what is 'not mine' overcomes the difference of 'mine' and 'not mine', and hence there seems to be no 'not-mine' that is radically other, since everything other in principle can be an object of thinking. I can think of anything, in principle think of everything, and hence there is nothing in principle foreign to thought.²

We could agree that, in principle, there is something correct about the argument: there is no limit we could plot in advance that would dictate to thought: thus far and no further. Quite to the contrary, thinking is a process which reveals itself not just in thinking this or that, but in overcoming the limits posed by seeming otherness, and hence a process that overcomes its own limits, and hence it seems in principle limited by nothing other than itself.

This line of thought is important for Hegel in his struggle with the scepticism of modern epistemology. This issues from dualistic sources, whether posed in empiricist terms or rationalist, where subject and object are fixed as counterposed. Modern scepticism is entrenched against metaphysics, and indeed against the knowledge of God. This is even evident in the philosophy of Kant which claims to plot the limits of knowing, and seemingly eviscerates the rational arguments of the traditional ways to God. Hegel will claim that there is an internal instability in this project of plotting limits, since, as is well known, he argues that one has to be beyond a limit in order to plot it. One has to be on two sides of the limit, to say that one can and must stay on only one side of it. A limit, at most, is a provisional boundary that with further thought can be transcended. If so, then the prohibition on the knowing of God must be revised, since there seems something infinitely self-transcending about human thought. It is *capax infiniti*.

You might object: this is thinking, and Kant too allows us to **think things** beyond the boundaries of sense, but he does not thereby identify thinking with *knowing*. We can think about everything, in principle, but that does not mean we can know everything. We can think about God, but that does not mean we have knowledge of God in the sense of true understanding, sustained in its assertions by the warrant of definitive evidence. Putting aside the question if we have definitive evidence for anything, this view reinstates the difference between us and God in terms of knowing, though not necessarily in terms of thinking. But thinking can also be idle, and hence we seem not quite free of that suspicion of useless speculation, mentioned above. Kant himself is not content to raise a suspicion of useless speculation: there is a *judgement* against it: theoretically, it is useless.

How does Hegel meet this situation? I think, on the whole, he is more willing to grant some difficulty when the object of knowing is more univocally distinct from the knower, as when I know the sun, and know it as not me. But where that difference is not so clear-cut, or more complex, he moves in a different direction. This is especially the case when we come to knowing in the form of *self-knowledge*. When knowing seeks to know itself, it is both the subject and the object. And while it might be mistaken about itself, it can also interrogate and test itself. So it seems it can be both the question, the judge, and the answer in one. There seems to be no need to appeal to an extrinsic standard, for it, the self-knowing, seems also to be the *immanent* standard. In seeking to know itself, it is itself its own standard and judge. While it can appear to itself diversely, it is within its own immanence, and in terms of itself as its own standard, that it must judge the truth of these appearances to self. Self-knowing is, in this guise, a process of being true to self, of thinking being true to itself. There seems no need to appeal to anything finally beyond itself.

This is a point touched on before with the nature of absolute knowing, and perhaps the central nub of the epistemological view explored diversely in his *Phenomenology*. There are disjunctions there, and there are **misapprehensions**, and many misapprehensions when knowing conceives of itself in terms of a model that likens it wrongly to something other to itself. But knowing, the **attempt** to know, performs the interrogation on *itself*; as both question, answer, judge and standard, it learns of itself from its own errors about itself, and hence **through falsity** progressively comes to know itself more and more truly.

The details of that work are fascinating in their own right, but our need here is a brief outline of the overall structure of structures, and this, of course, is a dynamic structuring. In ordinary common sense, and in realistic models of knowing, it is the difference of the knowing subject and the known object that fixes attention. But knowing is of the object, and hence even here, there is no avoiding that we are fundamentally dealing with a *relation*. But how think of this relation? We will be stymied, if we have begun by fixing on the knower and known as fixed others; for then the relation must surmount an obstacle, and the surmounting in principle seems always partial, since we have in principle entrenched the difference of the two as ultimate. The results seem to be a variety of disappointments, and at the extreme, scepticism, when all attempts to know end with **not knowing**. If this is the last word, every attempt must end in failure. The model here is one of a *dyadic otherness* between subject and object, in which the relation sought, while seeming

to move beyond the dyadic form, always seems to collapse back into it, since dyadic thinking defines ultimately the nature of thinking here.

Hegel will claim all we have to do is think otherwise than on the fixation of the difference: simply become conscious of what is involved in this consciousness of the object as other. If we become conscious of the dyadic relation involved in consciousness of an object, we are already beyond such a dyadic relation. Indeed such a 'being beyond dyadic otherness' is always at work in the dynamic that lives from knowing as a relation: not simply a relation between subject and object, but knowing as already within that relation, for how otherwise could it ever speak of the object at all, if there were not this relativity at work from the outset.

Thus we must reformulate the dyadic relation between S and O. There is a more basic sense of 'being in relation' within which we already are, in order for us to be able to speak of this dyad between S and O. This basic relativity is one that includes within itself the dyadic relation. It is a relativity more inclusive than the dyadic relation. By thinking of self-knowing we can understand this.³

Here there is a form of knowing which exceeds the dualism of S-O. This is where the structure of structures manifested by self-consciousness is decisive. Self-consciousness refers us to a *knowing of the knowing* involved in consciousness of an object. As the latter is marked by the dyadic relation (S-O), so the former shows the triadic structure S(S-O). In being related to an object, I am in relation to myself as in relation to an object. The I of self-consciousness epitomizes the power of the more inclusive relativity, for not only can it relate to an other, it can include in itself its relation to an other. Hence in its self-relation, that other is not a radically alien other, but *its* other. There is the fact too that this inclusive relating is not static; and since in principle it can think anything, its inclusivity knows no absolute boundary but itself. It is the 'absolute self' that, in relating itself to an other, relates itself to itself as including that other within itself.

Recall my citation of Hegel on cultus in the previous chapter. It is worth citing again, for I have just given the logic that would appear to overlap his description of 'prayer' there:

In the cultus, on the contrary, God is on one side, I am on the other, and the determination is *the including, within my own self, of myself with God*, the knowing of myself within God and of God within me.

The cultus involves giving oneself this supreme, absolute enjoyment. There is feeling within it; I take part in it with my particular, subjective personality, knowing myself as this individual included in and with God, knowing myself within the truth (and I have my truth only in God), i.e., joining myself as myself in God together with myself. [LPR, 191]

Thinking God Beyond the Dualistic Limit

Criticism of every effort to impose extrinsic limits on thought has consequences for the possibility of knowledge of God. Hegel, I said, is famous for formulating arguments that claim the incoherence of plotting a limit for knowing, such as Kant is said to effect. The simple, and powerful argument is: to plot a limit we have to be on both sides of the limit, and hence have to surpass the limit plotted; hence the

plotted limit is no ultimate limit. Every limit is in principle surpassable by its being stated as a limit. This is a powerful argument which importantly reminds us of the open self-transcending power of human knowing (T2), and the potential infinity at work in its otherwise finite being. But the *interpretation of its meaning* is by no means obvious. Nor is it obviously true that the uses to which it is put by Hegel are the correct ones. To note only one point, Hegel blurs the difference between what I will call the intentional infinitude of the human being and the actual infinitude that is the reserve of God alone. This difference is not self-evidently one to be speculatively surpassed by saying that the human infinitude is dialectically identical with the divine. God may 'surpass' this ontological difference, but humans *qua* humans cannot, so long as they remain human. Humans would have *to be* God to surpass it through themselves. And perhaps this hyperbolic ambition is at work in Hegel's thinking, but more on this later.

Hegel undoubtedly has much persuasive power on his side when he tries to remind us about something futile in the philosophical project to insist univocally on limit. What limits there are, are to be found in the seeking itself, not imposed *ab extra* from the outset, with a prohibition issued from the beginning that knowing is not to trespass. *Sapere aude!* Thus Kant. And then the audacity of this daring is quickly turned to milk and water in a cautious critical regime that paralyzes philosophical daring, and especially all speculative boldness. Hegel would rather drink of wilder wines, provoke the prohibition by going to the limit, seeing then what stands.

The ordinary concept, of which many philosophies are rationalizations, inevitably hits its head against the problem of limits, hence can never get beyond finitude. True, there is often a resort to paradoxical language with respect to God, and the absolute. Protocols are developed with respect to speaking about the divine: our speaking is not merely univocal, not merely equivocal, it is analogical, or hyperbolic, or we proceed by way of negation or supereminence, and so on. Hegel's way is, in one sense, continuous with these protocols, in another sense, not. In one respect, the speculative way is for him other than the 'ordinary' way, but in another respect, it is continuous: for his way claims to be the self-knowing, the self-consciousness of what is immanent in the 'ordinary' way, and so finally it is not absolutely other. It claims to articulate explicitly the 'elevation' to the infinite *already* always at work in finitude, and hence as not 'beyond' and other. From the standpoint of this continuity, there may be no need for special sacred protocols. If we need anything, we need 'method', but method for Hegel is just our more self-conscious advertence to the dialectic always already at work in everything. (Notice again the immanent stress.) The special sacred protocols point to a disjunction of finitude and infinity which they claim to help bridge. For Hegel's dialectical method, there is no such gap and no such bridge necessary, hence there is a kind of speculative univocity here, and this despite the fact that it receives a name that does not look at all univocal: the dialectical unity of opposites; and God as the unity of unities inclusive of finitude as its opposite, and of the oppositions of finitude itself.

But we need to fill in some more gaps here, and there are argued considerations in Hegel's way of arriving at this point. If the truth is this speculative unity, Hegel is well aware of needing to address what looks like the contrary situation. The younger Hegel said that the need of philosophy arises from *dis-union* (*Entzweiung*).

This en-doubling, as we might translate it, precipitates the problem; such division or en-doubling is to be granted but also to be overcome. Overall, Hegel does not so much regress to a prior unity of life that seems to hold pre-reflectively, as that he wants to advance, through reason, to a new mediated unity in which the division is faced and transcended: the en-doubling, not just endlessly re-doubled, but restored beyond doubling to its immanent unity. And yet there is a regressive side, in that, if the unity is not already at work, and at work immediately, we cannot advance to its fully mediated form.

If we only emphasize regress, we would perhaps have a philosophy and religion of feeling. If we divorce advance from regress, we would have a merely rationalistic construct, and with this, hostility to religion as lacking rationality. But if we understand the advance as the dialectical unfolding of what is implicitly immediate and immanent in the beginning, the mediated result will be both concrete and rational. Indeed in relation to religion, Hegel holds it will enact a claim to fidelity to the elevation to the infinite, itself already enacted representationally in religion itself. The advance that regresses to the implicit immediacy, that remains true to the immanent ultimacy of what is already at work, will for Hegel be one which will be determining of its own content through the whole process of self-determination. The immediacy is not an immediacy outside the process of mediation as a whole; the mediation is not an intermediation with something radically other; the mediation is a self-completing self-mediation through the otherness of its own immediate form. Philosophy, Hegel holds, finds its own conceptual mediation in the immediate mediation of religion itself.

Speculative Immanence and Holistic Self-Determination

This emphasis on the self-determination of the process returns us again to the stress of Kant's philosophy on 'autonomy'. It will be helpful here to see how the abstract argument dovetails with more far-reaching concerns. Hegel's sense of the speculative concept, and his speculative God, cannot be divorced from his reinterpretation of the transcendental character of Kant's philosophy (previously we mentioned Kant's moral doctrine and the issues it generated).

Kant's transcendental philosophy claims to inaugurate a Copernican revolution, but more properly it *continues* an arc of development in modern thought, epitomized by Descartes' beginning in turning towards the *cogito*. The intelligibility of being is not to be determined primarily through external sources, or being itself as other to us, but through the knowing self as the primarily mediating reality that composes intelligibility or imposes it on other-being (T1). Intelligibilities are generated more primally from sources immanent in knowing itself. Not the object as other, but the subject as knowing, and intimate to itself as capable of self-knowing – this is the power that mediates the relation between self and other, subject and object, knowing and being. There is a relation *between* these two, but this 'between' is mediated through the self and its active cognitive powers. We do not *receive* intelligibility from the given but transform the given and thus render it intelligible for ourselves for the first time. We constrain nature to answer questions of our devising, as Kant overtly says; we are not passive before its being-there, and its being-other. Quite to

the contrary, its being-there, and being-other have no intelligible significance until our knowing powers transform its givenness. Then we claim it is no longer merely given. We give it too ourselves, and so through it, we stake our claim to our own self-determining power. We can see the convergence between epistemology and morals, theory and practice: the diminution of the contribution of the given, and other-being (whether T1 or T3) in the determination of intelligibility, goes with the elevation of the significance of the self's determining power (T2). The diminution and elevation are simply two sides of the same process by which the self stakes and consolidates its own claim to complete immanent self-determination.

If Hegel grants the transcendental claims of Kant, nevertheless, these, like those of Descartes' *cogito*, are formulated too dualistically. And so in seeming to solve the problem, they reintroduce it – and most evidently reintroduce it, if, as Hegel's claim, the need of philosophy arises from dis-union, en-doubling. One might say that the dualistic tendencies of Descartes and Kant solve the relation of knower and known by resort to one side of the relation and hence reintrench the dualism reflectively. A further way of thinking is required to overcome this reflective dualism, and to grant that the relation of knowing and known is more than dualistic opposition, and this, even if the knowing self does have the determining power claimed for it by the transcendental turn in philosophy. This is where the dialectical and speculative character of Hegel's mode of philosophizing can be situated.

Let me first state the general point, and then turn to some important details. The general nature of dialectical thinking can be said to address the happening of difference and opposition, hence also division and dis-union. The immediate unity of life gives rise to difference that strains against any merely immediate unity. Philosophy arises as a thinking in that strain, and arises as trying to think the differences and think beyond their opposition to a further more mediated unity. Dialectical thinking tries to follow the arising of oppositions from the immediate unity, but in the opposition itself also to follow the togetherness of the opposites in the process as a whole. Only so does it see the opposites as mediated into a new unity in the fuller unfolding of the process.

Thus dialectic has a negative side in that the fixity of oppositions is undone: what seems as opposed is more fully a process of self-opposition in which there is also an anticipation of mediation and indeed the constitution of a fuller unity. The opposition is really a self-opposition (the en-doubling of the original one or unity). But the self-opposition generates a *self-becoming* in which the self becomes itself more fully than it could ever be, did it not fall into division from its initial immediate unity. Hegel tends to reserve dialectic for the more *negative* side of the process. To speculative reason, properly speaking, he assigns the more *positive* outcome in which the unity or the coincidence of the opposites is articulated.⁴ This applies to all levels of consideration, including the most sublime, namely the opposition of the human and the divine, which religion claims more absolutely to address and overcome.

What has all this to do with religion and the speculative concept of God?⁵ The shift towards the determining power of self, or subjectivity, a power that also points to self-determining power, has consequences for the claims to know God. If there is a radical self-determining knowing, then also, if there is a knowing of God by or in this knowing, there is no need to appeal to anything other than the process of self-

determining knowing itself. It is already the knowing of God, perhaps not always developed explicitly as such, but immediately and implicitly so. In other words, there is no way to God, for there is no God away. We are already there, though we do not know this explicitly, do not know it in properly self-conscious, self-mediating form. And since there is no God away, and no way to God, religion itself is also always already there, and hence is the way that is no way, since whichever way we traverse we always come back to ourselves and where we are.

Of course, this has radical implications for how we conceive the *being of God*. For Hegel, the pure knowing that determines itself to absolutely immanent self-knowing is the knowing of God. But it is also, it would seem, the *being of God*, since no ultimate distinction between knowing and being can be sustained at this level for Hegel. How then grant the being of God as other to us, as other in a manner that is more irreducible than even the givenness of the world as already there before being known? That otherness as claimed seems to be completely undercut by Hegel's strategy. Hegel gets to the other by being already immediately with the other – this immediate certainty he calls *faith* in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, but note with this faith, or immediate certainty, there is no question of going elsewhere, though there may be the question of explicating what is immanent in its immediacy. Hegel solves the problem by redefining its terms, and less dissolves it, as redescribes the nature of the other at stake so as to contain it within the logic of self-determining knowing.

True, the claims of autonomy, or self-determination on the part of the power of knowing itself make difficulties for granting the otherness of God; also for granting givenness in a deeper sense, namely, religiously granted as the very gift of creation as other to us; and indeed for the gift of our own finite being as originally given to itself, but not as first and primally giving itself to itself. The ultimate *passio essendi* of finitude is redescribed as an immediate moment of the process of immanence that concretizes the whole's *conatus essendi*. The eternity of that whole replaces the God beyond the whole, and displaces the seeking of that God, or transcending towards it, of the creature's *passio essendi* in favour of the immanent self-knowing of that whole.

If we recall the antinomy of autonomy and transcendence, Hegel here avoids it, by avoiding transcendence (T3) in any sense robustly other to immanent self-transcendence. He claims the latter proves its absoluteness by being autonomously self-determining through and through. In other words, just as there is a rejection of the immanent dualism represented by Descartes, there is the rejection of a transcendent, or vertical dualism between man/world and God. Dualism is always for Hegel a (re)statement of the problem of dis-union, not a solution to it. There is no thought for him of a two-some, or doubling, or re-doubling that does not fit the dualistic scheme. The solution to it is to think more completely in holistic terms, and we will come to the God of the whole.

The God of the Whole

If division is the beginning of philosophy, unity is the telos. Not unexpectedly, Hegel defines philosophy in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* as the study

of unity. This is reflected in terms of the teleology of thinking which is oriented to the whole. To give a logos of the whole – this is one of the traditional quests of philosophy. This tradition is reflected in Hegel's speculative concept, and his God might well be called the whole of wholes. I have already cited Hegel's famous saying that *the true is the whole* (*das Wahre ist das Ganze*). (Thus Hegel describes his *Logic* in terms of the circle of circles.⁶) Any standpoint of knowing less comprehensive than the knowing of the whole is in some measure implicated in partiality and hence falsity, and implicated thus even when the partiality is itself also partly true. This holds true for God also as the absolute. Short of the whole we live in the equivocal play of the partly true and partly false, the one-sidedly true and false – in duplicitious doubleness, that is. We do not take the measure of this division which it is the task of philosophy to address and overcome. The holistic orientation is as old perhaps as Parmenides in metaphysics. The true is the One. For as there is only one whole, so it seems, so also there is only one One. Outside of this there is nothing, and no God also beyond the whole.

If this looks like a univocity of being, it need not be intended in any reductive sense. Hegel seeks rather a speculatively inclusive univocity in which dialectic articulates the passage through the oppositional many in the direction of the more inclusive, and then all-inclusive whole or One. Some contemporary admirers of Hegel play mum about these latter aspects of Hegel, for they are not entirely in tune with more pluralistic aspects of our current postmodern *Zeitgeist*. For someone with a longer memory beyond such embarrassments, we need not be silent about the long tradition from Parmenides in which Hegel places himself. We find no such embarrassment on Hegel's own part when in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he says: 'It is therefore worthy of note that thought must begin by placing itself at the standpoint of Spinozism; to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all Philosophy.' Hegel notes that the only difference between his own standpoint and that of Eleatic philosophy bears on the idea of concrete individuality that comes from Christianity (Hegel, 1892–96, 3, 257–8). Some might marvel at the ease with which Hegel cites Spinozism, Eleaticism and Christianity in the same breath. But let us ask: how is Hegel's speculative holism developed with regard to God, the religious representation for the Whole of all wholes?

There is a difficult question to be asked here: how is it possible for a human being to be true to the whole, since we are finite, and hence, as within the whole, never identical with the whole? Within the whole, there seems a *constitutive disjunction* between us and this whole. But if this disjunction cannot be overcome, and this must be so if it is constitutive, it is not clear we can even *make* the claim, much less make intelligible sense of it, that the true is the whole. To make the claim implies being on a par with the whole, but if we are finite we cannot be thus on a par, hence thus make that claim; or if we do, it is a claim that must immediately bring itself into question.

One must ask further: how can Hegel be on a cognitive par with the absolute whole? If he were, and were able to know it, would he not have to be beyond the whole, on both sides of its circle as the ultimate limit? Would he not have to be more than man and God as two actualities within the whole or *defining* it? Would the Hegelian philosopher then be beyond the God of the whole, but also the whole? But if so, would he not also be beyond the true as the whole? What hyper-holistic

truth could that be? Or does it not mean that our sense of being true, and the being of the true, even for us finite beings within the middle, points *beyond the whole*, all wholes? Perhaps there is more at play, than giving a logos of the whole? If so, has this something to do with what I called the God beyond the whole? A God beyond representation, and beyond concept? And perhaps the 'beyond' of the representation is in its finite way, *truer to it*, just in calling itself into question regarding the whole, and thus also preserving openness to the 'beyond'? This would be to move in a different direction to Hegel.

Hegel claims to address the difficulty by providing, as he says, the natural consciousness with its 'ladder to the absolute'. The later Hegel seems not quite sure how to integrate his *Phenomenology* into his system as a whole, and there is an entire literature associated with this.⁷ Its importance is that here he did acknowledge and try to address the claims of finite, natural consciousness, and provide the mediation by which it could be said to arise to the absolute standpoint, which, we recall he says, is the point where knowing no longer needs to go beyond itself.⁸ Hegel's absolute standpoint: why go beyond itself, if it has attained to the standpoint of the true being the whole? There is nothing further. But is this claim sustainable? Is it sustainable without appropriating the claim of religion to absoluteness and incorporating it into the immanences of philosophical thought itself? Must not philosophy do in thought what religion seems to claim to offer in another modality? But can philosophy do that, can philosophy as the thinking of finite philosophers do that? Does it not seem that only a God or the absolute itself could do it – namely, attain the true as the whole? Or must the philosopher become identical with God, *be God*, to sustain the claim to absoluteness here made?

The lovers today of Hegel lite will not like that question, but if so, perhaps again it is their intellectual 'comfort-levels' that should be noted, not only the implications of Hegel's claims. Or else we reinterpret those claims and, lo and behold, anything more extreme or radical or ultimate about them vanishes, and we wonder why we should even bother with such an anodyne Hegel. We are put to sleep by reassurances that there is no offence in Hegel to contemporary tastes. The fact remains that Hegel's project is marked by a kind of monstrous ambition, by contrast with the sober neutralities of hyperbolically cautious scholars.

A paradigmatic way (for the tradition of metaphysics) in which the dis-union has to be faced is the difference of the particular and the universal, ontologically formulated in doctrines deriving from the Platonic heritage; or more epistemologically formulated, in terms of the contrast of the finite particular natural consciousness and the universal standpoint of science or philosophical knowing for which the justified claim can be made that the true is the whole. Hegel will want to bring the ontological and epistemological together. Nevertheless, the finite particular self is always set against the otherness of other-being, and in that sense, always other to the whole, even if also within the whole. This is most evident in knowing, where the knower is also set over against the otherness of the reality to be known. True knowing may be, in some complexly qualified way,⁹ the overcoming of that 'over-againstness'. But can there be attained a knowing where that 'over-againstness' can be overcome absolutely?

This form of the problem defines most epistemologies of post-Cartesian modernity: the 'over-againstness' of the object *vis-à-vis* the subject, and the mediation of their

difference in the relation of true knowing itself. And the 'subject' here might be as diverse as humanity, or the transcendental ego, or the historical process, or human language, or it might be the proletariat, or be Will, or Will to Power, you name it. Hegel cannot be quite included in this crowd, since 'over-againstness' is just what the Idea or *Geist* is said to overcome. This is why dialectical thinking is crucial for Hegel. For it *negates* the fixity of the subject and the object; the subject is not fixed here; the object fixed there; the subject is mediating power in relation to what is over against it, which as thus mediated is no longer over against; while the object also enters into a series of dynamic relations with the knower seeking to comprehend it; the fixity of the two sides are said by Hegel to be dissolved by the negative activity of dialectic. What more concretely obtains is their togetherness which, for Hegel, is not so much constituted at the end, as known explicitly to have been at work all along, though not fully known in the self-knowing form that now is achieved in the end of science. Likewise, the 'over-againstness' of the particular and the universal is known as a fixation of the two that distorts the nature of their mediated relation. We are beyond subject and object as dualistic opposites, but in order for this to be fully known the particularity of the finite subject must be transcended and the standpoint of the concrete universal attained. Unlike the abstract universal, there is nothing 'over against' the concrete universal.

The ladder to the absolute which Hegel claims the ordinary consciousness rightly asks of science is offered by the long unfolding of different forms in the *Phenomenology*. The particular consciousness, over against the object, always as finite seeks to go beyond itself towards the universality of the whole of other-being that seems to englobe it; true universality is only achieved when it no longer needs to go beyond itself; when it has been expanded or elevated to a position or form in which this antithetical opposition of finite consciousness is fully overcome. Self-transcending is granted; but the goal it seeks is the true as the whole, when self-transcending no longer needs to go beyond itself. Absolute knowing, philosophical knowing will be when there is no longer any transcendence as other (*vide* T3 earlier), and self-transcending transcends self but in doing so, it transcends to self, and so in the object of its transcending it finds itself again. If there is then any otherness remaining, it is thus *within* the inclusive process of self-transcending (*vide* T2) which transcends self to self via any otherness in which the self only recognizes itself again. Dis-union is not denied, but it becomes the source of a dynamic self-transcending, energized by its own internal difference, and challenged by the difference that seems beyond itself, only to find finally that this other difference is also its own difference, and in this other difference it is only coming back to itself again. The division is self-division which dynamizes its own self-knowing return to itself.

The speculative monism here at issue is reflected in Hegel's famous slogan: Substance must become Subject. Hegel wants to reformulate Spinoza, but in terms of the idea of self-consciousness that is central in Kant and transcendental philosophy. A philosophy for which substance is the absolute or God cannot be enough, for it cannot do justice to the self-relating power of subjectivity. Hence while its idea of God might well emphasise the whole, it will speak of power, and not of spirit – even though thought is one of the attributes of Spinoza's God. For Hegel, 'subject' is a fuller characterization of the absolute, just because of its overt dynamic power,

its power of self-relating in its dynamic transcendence of its own identity: a unity that can other itself, and in that othering be in relation to what is other to itself, though again as self-relating, be just more mediately in relation to itself in this relation to the other. 'Subject' answers this notion of a *self-transcending unity* that relates to otherness and to itself in otherness, and hence never loses its unity in all its relations to its own others. This unity, one might say, is ecstatic and always losing itself, and yet also it never leaves itself and so is eternally finding itself. Substance as a name for the absolute whole cannot do justice to this unity of ecstasis and self-repose.

I dwell on this because there is clearly a lot to what Hegel says. The powers of subjectivity are mindful and they are dynamic and they are formings of selving and also self-transcendence, hence also of relations to other-being. What Hegel stresses primarily in all of this self-transcending is a dynamic of mediated recurrence to self: loss of self is also recurrence to self. The self that transcends itself becomes itself by losing itself; and hence it does not lose itself in losing itself but finds itself again in more explicated form. Hegel is right to draw attention to these things. But if there is truth here, *is it the whole truth? Is it the truth of the whole?* Hegel will say 'yes'. But are there crucial omissions needed to make this claim? If so, the Hegelian whole will not be the 'whole'. Why?

What is Speculatively Suspended in the Blur of Sublated Difference?

In all of the above, you will notice a certain stylization of the other and the relation to the other. The nature of the relating of self-transcending to the other is curtailed relative to those forms of intermediated relativity in which the other figures differently than as the self in its own otherness. First, that stylization is characterized in terms of the 'over against'; the other as 'over against' always impels the finite self to go beyond itself, and this as ever going beyond itself, can never be completely satisfied with itself, for it always falls short of the true and the whole (on Hegel's terms). How then overcome this seemingly infinitely repeated dissatisfaction? Here again the structure of a shift decisive for Hegel's entire enterprise is evident from what we have with this, his transition from consciousness to self-consciousness. The standpoint of consciousness is 'consciousness of'. This intentionality of knowing always seems to imply an other, which also, it seems, remains in some final way beyond; and if so beyond, we always risk the dualistic opposition Hegel wants to escape. Hegel's point: knowing means we must not only be conscious of, but conscious of self in being conscious of. Were we not conscious of self in being conscious of, we would never know that we knew. To know truly is always to be conscious of knowing and having known; it is not just consciousness of the object. Of course, we can be so caught up in the object that our 'intentionality' towards it is 'forgotten'; but though forgotten, it is not inoperative. And once we seek to know what it is to know, this operance comes through again. The 'intentionality' is *returned to itself* in the knowing of an object or reality that it intends as other. Knowing of X as other is unintelligible without consciousness of self as conscious of X as other. If consciousness implies self-consciousness, the latter, once granted, opens a decisive insight into the *form of relativity* binding subject and object. This

is the shift, mentioned above, from the dyadic, oppositional relation (S-O), to the triadic, inclusive relation S(S-O). This triadic inclusive relativity is a dynamic relation, better, a dynamic of relating. S knows *itself* in its difference to O; but as including this difference within itself, it *constitutes itself* as an articulated unity that is self-differentiating and self-relating. A triadic self-constituting unity that is dynamically inclusive of immanent otherness: such a formula could well be applied to Hegel's trinitarian God.¹⁰

When we come to God, what I think Hegel does is speculatively *blur the difference* between subjectivity as we know it, with its own infinite restlessness, and God as absolute subjectivity which becomes the infinite whole, both fulfilling our infinite restlessness, but also marked by its own dialectical restlessness (see above the ecstasis which mirrors our restlessness) in having to go beyond itself to be itself. In other words, God is just like subjectivity, nay, *is* absolute subjectivity (inter-subjectivity):¹¹ the absolute must other itself; the restless drive, or ecstasis of self-transcending must come out of itself and take on the form of otherness in the world of finitude. Just as the restlessness of finitude in us reaches towards the infinite to seek its own wholeness, the restlessness or ecstasis of the infinite in the absolute reaches beyond itself towards the finite in order to constitute its own wholeness, and now in immanence and not as transcendence. God is conceived on the model of inclusive self-knowing, the same form of which is ascribed to our self-knowledge. But the imputation of the same dialectical-speculative structure to the absolute itself occurs with a blurring of the difference of what it might mean for the human to be so, and what it might be for God to be so; and with a muting of any doubt that there might be an otherness to the absolute, and an otherness between man and God that cannot be described in these patterns of speculative dialectic. The protocols of speculative dialectic that allow us to approach God, make it such that difference is suspended, suspended and allegedly reinstated in true form, that is, suspended such that the difference between the image and the original vanishes, the difference of man and God. And this is encouraged just by the dominant way of thinking defined by the terms of Hegel's speculative holism.

It is not that Hegel would now halt and say: yes, you have a point, let us search this other difference differently. No, he would be driven further to suspend this difference, any difference too, even in the very act of claiming to comprehend it. The whole momentum of his thinking is carried forward by such a logic that we would have to call into question the entire enterprise to introduce that pause which would ask: has something been closed down here, something sent into recess, such that we now cannot see it here? And even when we try to see and hear, *can* it be seen and heard, for how we see and hear it will be in terms of the speculative logic that has just sent it into recess? Every one of its new accessions will not be given access. Appearances will be again made recessive, for the very logic at work inexorably will do that, if and when and to the degree that it takes itself to be absolute, or the form of absolute thinking or knowing. What allows Hegel to see so much is also what blinds him. Is there not a strange sightlessness to absolute knowing? A sightlessness Hegel's absolute knowing, strangely, cannot itself see about *itself*? Strangely, since we are supposed to deal with absolute *self-knowing*.

Perhaps a less complex way of making a related point would be to say that what Hegel is doing is blurring the difference between what I called above an intentional

infinitude and the actual infinite.¹² Neither of these is merely an infinite succession, which Hegel calls the 'bad infinite' (*schlechte Uneindigkeit*). There is a return to self in the intentional infinitude along a line of succession, the infinite of succession: self-transcendence (T2) recurs to itself in reaching beyond itself into the extensiveness of other-being (say, T1). This reaching is understood as the intention *achieved* in the return to self, by Hegel, and hence the difference of intention and actuality is speculatively blurred by him. So we do not always know if we are supposed to be looking at the finite infinitude of human self-transcending or the absolute, infinite infinitude of transcendence itself or God. There is no ultimate difference between these two, but God's transcendence as other (T3) is rendered as self-returning self-transcendence (T2). The speculative blur remains, though it might call itself absolute knowing.

You could also say, *contra* Hegel, that it is not true that when we turn to self-knowing we come into immanence at home with itself in complete self-transparency. In self-knowing, knowing knows an excess in its own immanence: something other to thought *thinking* itself that enables thought to think at all but is not completely determinable through itself, nor a matter of thought's own self-determination. This immanent otherness to thought thinking itself is strikingly communicated in the measure that the infinitude of serving strikes home: its excess to finite determinability and its own complete self-determination. This immanent excess, or excess in immanence is hyperbolic, and perhaps also says something about the hyperbolic being of God beyond the whole. The 'self-return' of 'self-thinking' must be viewed otherwise in the light of the hyperbolic God beyond the whole.

Andrea del Sarto: 'Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?' Too true. And then: 'And thus we half-men struggle'. Hegel would have none of this: no reach exceeding his grasp; no struggling of half-men. Whole men, and the God of the whole, for Hegel; and in claiming to grasp it, nothing more exceeding us or the whole, and no God beyond the whole either. Not half-men, no, but philosophical incarnations of the original wholes, brilliantly depicted by Aristophanes. Though again, not cut wholes like Aristophanes, for Hegel, but 'cured' wholes, beyond all cuts. But what of the space still *between* us and God, even when we attain some wholeness of being? Being whole is not being the whole; as being the whole is not being God. And perhaps, with a demurrer to Andrea del Sarto, it is not the struggling of *half-men* that occupies *us*, but of men more whole who, nevertheless, know the *constitutive* betweenness, or intermediacy of the human condition. It is *our fullness in the between* that knows reach always to exceed grasp (in our relation) with God. There is always more, something superlatively great to which we reach: a power greater than which we cannot conceive, but greater (exceedingly) than anything we can conceive.

Beyond Holistic Immanence and the Ontological Argument

I take this cue to remark on how Hegel reformulates the ontological argument in rebuttal of Kant's critique. There are a number of treatments of the ontological argument,¹³ but I want to note how in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* of 1827 (*LPR*, 162 ff.), Hegel appears to reverse Kant, even to turn about the order in

which Kant treats of the three same proofs. Kant starts with the ontological argument, claims to put it down; then more gently handles the other two, the cosmological and the physico-theological, only to more gently put them down also as rational arguments delivering the certain necessity claimed for them by the rationalists. The death blow to the first looks brutal, the death blow to the other two less violent, but they are to be put down because the ontological argument drags them down in its doom.

Hegel begins with the cosmological, goes on to the physico-theological, and concludes, rather, crowns the unfolding, with the resurrection of the ontological argument. In Hegel's reconstruction, the first emphasizes being, the second emphasizes order, design, purpose, moving towards *nous*; and this movement is crowned with full success in the third, where thought thinking thought is also the speculative unity of thought and being, or in the older language, the unity of essence and existence. Aquinas: God's essence is to exist, though the terms mean something different to Hegel's usage. The traces of life in the first two are consummated in the resurrected fullness of life in the rethought third. The death of the *Verstand* will be counteracted by the resurrecting power of the speculative *Vernunft*.

One could say that Kant's version of this proof represents a fixation with the model of consciousness. The form is the form of the *Verstand*, Hegel says, and Kant (how generous Hegel can be, ever ready to say 'yes' before saying 'no') performed a service by abolishing them in that form – the old metaphysical form of rationalistic proof. I take 'metaphysical' also to refer to the concept of God that is determined in terms of transcendence as other (T3), hence allegedly fixing God as a dualistic 'beyond'. The death of this 'beyond' is aided by Kant's critique of the 'metaphysical' proofs, but there is new life beyond this death, in the recovery by speculative *Vernunft* of the true content of the immanent God. Hegel aims to perform even greater service than Kant, by showing not only the true content but also the true form – resurrection of God in the form of speculative *Vernunft* beyond the death inflicted by the rationalizations of *Verstand*.

How does the dyadic form of consciousness or *Verstand* dominate the Kantian way? With the ontological proof, the presupposition of the gap between (*pure*) *thought and being* is most overtly at issue. In the other proofs, the gap is between finite being, especially our transcending (T2) and divine being (T3), mediated by knowledge of given finite being (T1). In the cosmological proof, it bears on knowledge mediated by indeterminate existence; in the physico-theological, it bears on determinate existence, especially in the form of the appearance of design in finite nature. There are dyadic relations between finitude and God to be traversed in the latter two. But in the ontological proof what is in question is the gap between pure thought and being, the purely rational thought of God and the being of God.

Kant's version briefly: we have a concept of God; and from the concept we try to deduce, or reason to, the existence of God. From the subject, purely on the basis of thinking it alone, we try to arrive at the object. From the thought alone we seek to move to the existent actuality as other to the thought alone. Kant rejects this, for thought always deals with possibility, not with actuality. Evidential warrant has to come from what is other to the thought-possibility, before existence claims can be rendered legitimate. Thought here would appear to Hegel as a kind of representational

consciousness of God: the being, God, is represented in the thought, and then from the representing thought, we claim to reason to the being represented. On this model, there is always a duality between the consciousness and the being of its 'object': this is what the 'of' means. No rational necessity determines the transition from one side to the other. I would say that the meaning of *transition* is at the core of the difficulty here. For Kant, if there is a transition it must be based on some evidences of experience, but these can never give full rational certainty.

Hegel will agree: if this is what the thought or concept of God is, there is no way of rationally justifying the claim to God's necessary existence on that basis alone. But what if the notion of thought ought to be understood on the model of relativity implied by self-consciousness? 'Concept' will then mean something different than in Kant. There is no problem of bridging a gap between possibility and actuality, nor of evidences from external experience to justify the transition. The meaning of 'transition' is quite different. With Hegel's sense of the concept, there is not the problem of bridging the gap at the centre of Kant's thinking: there are no gaps of that sort for *Vernunft*. Does Hegel not say that the proofs are nothing more than descriptions of the *self-elevation* to God (LPR, 167)? The problem, if there is one, is indeed one of *transition*, but are there transitions that are essentially *immanent transitions*? Hegel's answer, on the basis of the unitary-triadic relativity shown by self-consciousness, is yes. Here we have *immanent transitions, even when we deal with relations to what is other; for these relations to what is other are also immanent, immanent, that is, in self-consciousness*. With self-consciousness there is a relational process of moving from subject to object, from thought to being, but that relational process is itself immanent in a more inclusive relation of which thought and being are two sides. On this model, the so-called two sides are always together, or in the relational process of passing from one to the other. There is no external gap to be mediated.

There is here a certain reformulation of the *cogito*: I think, I am. Thought necessarily implies a claim to be. There is a certain sense in which Hegel, so to say, 'de-singularizes' the ontological argument. Its truth cannot be confined to a special sacred 'object', God, but extends to the whole. The traditional argument confines the ontological proof to 'God' as the highest object, the *ens realissimum*, but what it shows can be said, for Hegel, to be the immanent character of *all* proper thought: thought that is, thought as at home with itself, in which the difference of the thinking self and the object thought is transcended in a more inclusive relation. This 'de-singularization' is also of a piece with Hegel's dialectical deconstruction of God as a singular, special, transcendent other or object. The ontological argument, in his hands, *claims positively to pass beyond* this dialectical deconstruction of the so-called 'metaphysical' God, in that it confirms the absoluteness of thought: the thought that does not think a radical other, but that thinks itself in thinking its other. This indeed might be said to be the very life of God for Hegel: absolute thinking that in thinking its other thinks itself again. The circle of the absolute whole traverses the circuit of its own absolute self-mediation in and through the otherness of actuality that is its own otherness and actuality.¹⁴

At work, then, in Hegel's reformulation of the ontological argument is the identity of being and thinking, understood in a *post-transcendental* form. The transcendental ego provides a way to rethink the concept. But the concept as

transcendental is not an empty abstraction or separated universal or idea: it is a self-particularizing universal. It is the universal that is particularized as self, self-thinking. It is the *cogito* that is, the thought that posits itself, and so as thinking is the unity of thinking and being. This is the Idea or universal as self-determining, positing itself as determinate, and as existing: self-determining in the other, since the other is just its own determination. The *Begriff* is a speculatively transformed transcendental ego: self-positing in its own otherness, and so absolutely in relation to itself. One might say here that Hegel effects a *different holistic singularization* of the ontological argument, along Spinoza's lines for whom there is only one true singular, though for Hegel this absolute singular is not Substance but Subject.¹⁵

Does Hegel give us a model of the absolute, and of God: the absolute is as self-positing, in the way God is as self-creating? Hegel would that it is no *model* – it is the reality of Godself. God is as self-creating; as thinking is as self-determining; as the transcendental ego is as self-positing. Again we are, it seems, beyond the dualism of thinking and being. Hegel's concept of God mirrors the process by which we seem to arrive at God; and each mirrors the nature of knowing, understood by him as an inclusive self-mediating process in which thinking, in relating to its object, is at home with itself. Highest being, as in Aristotle, is thought thinking itself, though now Hegel's God has performed the Kantian Copernican revolution and at a higher level of transcendental self-reflection performs its own at-onement with itself. The triadic relation that unifies with itself as one, and unifies with self in the process of passing through the terms in relation – this is Hegel's understanding of God.

Much could be said about this, not only about Kant's critique of the proof, but about Hegel's reformulation of it. It claims to be beyond double thinking, but one wonders if Hegel falls into his own double think on his speculative heights, and this with respect to whether there is here some counterfeiting of the Anselmian version of the 'argument'.¹⁶ I would say that the argument recommends a return into the immanence of thought, but the point is never for human immanence to become at home with itself, not for thought to be at one with itself: in the thought that thinks itself, as I implied already earlier, the other to thought thinking itself is shown in immanence itself; we do not have to move from here to there, from immanence to an extrinsic transcendence, for in the radical intimacy of thought there emerges for thought something that cannot be contained within the thought itself, and hence something which militates against the closure of conceptual thinking on itself. Transcendence as other (T3) emerges for us beyond dyadic dualism, and monistic holism, even a holism that has a triadic structure that seems to mimic the life of the trinitarian God. *Contra* Hegel, one might say that there is an even more deeply 'deconstructive' point to the ontological argument: to explode the pretensions to at-homeness of immanent thought with itself, but to do that where the opening up would most strike home, in the immanence of thought itself.¹⁷

This point is something continuous with Augustinian practice: the return from dualistic externality (T1) to interiority (T2) is followed by the ascent from inferiority to superiority (T3). The sense of the superior other appears in the immanences of interiority; but it is there in the deepest intimacy of the soul (T2) that the more radical sense of transcendence (T3) and excess of the divine is communicated. For someone who divines something of the truth of this Augustinian way,¹⁸ the Hegelian

way does things which mimic it but distort its truth for purposes that corrupt the exodus of the soul above itself into the excessive mystery of the divine. Far from deconstructing transcendence as other, it shows its necessity in the intimate place where Hegel seems to think he can finally lay this transcendence to rest.

There is also the matter of what *greatness* means. This is something which is much debated in the literature. And there is the statement by Anselm in Pros. 15: not only that God is the being greater than which none can be thought, but *greater than any thought*. Here you have the relativization of our thought of the immanence of God, in terms of what exceeds this immanence, in thought itself. The asymmetrical superiority of God is at issue in this question of 'greatness'. So also in the meaning of absolute singularity. The idea of unsurpassable greatness is harnessed by Hegel to a speculatively holistic logic: there is nothing beyond the wholes, not beyond the Whole of wholes – this last is perhaps Hegel's understanding of 'greatness. Though we must give a qualitative interpretation of the Whole of whole, this is not Anselm's greatness: there is an excess to God that is above all thought, and above holistic logic. This is communicated to us in the intimacy of prayer and thought. Recall again my citation of Hegel on prayer, and how it can be seen to mirror, or mimic, many of the points about immanent transitions and relativities I have tried to make just above. Recall, also, my claim that transitions and relations are turned around questionably by this, and most especially with respect to the movement of our elevation to the superior other. In the primal porosity of the intimate communication between God and humans, there is no absolute *self*-elevation *we* determine; there is gift that elevates the self: a *passio* that lifts the soul, not a *conatus* in which it lifts itself.

Thus what has been called the mystical interpretation of the ontological argument points to something absent in Hegel: that the rational argument is a moment in a fuller meditation on the being of God, and our relation to God, which has to take into account the suffering and finitude of the human. And these latter are not mere primitive stages, before we attain to the 'mature' level of pure self-mediating thinking. They are not the phenomenological struggles with dis-union to be overcome at the speculative level in the thinking that thinks itself. Quite to the contrary, they are the constitutive realities of our creaturely condition which always anchor speculative thought in the finite middle and re-mind the mindful human creature that she or he is oriented to a God beyond all the measure of our thought, whose greatness is in excess of all thought, a God beyond the whole understood in Hegel's sense. They, not self-mediating thought, are the *maturer* openings of the soul to the divine, intimate to the soul, and above the soul.

These more profound *sufferings* come on us at a level of ultimacy beyond rational argument, and open us to the divine in a manner beyond self-determining thinking. So in the latter part of Anselm's meditation, it is the mystical power of prayer that communicates the fuller truth of the ontological argument itself – this is the authentically Augustinian side to Anselm, which is slackening, sickening in Descartes, relatively dead in Kant, and mutated into something entirely other in Hegel. It is not faith seeking understanding: it is faith after the effort to understand that does not now dispel the mystery but finds itself more wrapped in it than ever, more deeply struck into perplexity and praise and love at the being greater than the greatest of our great thoughts. The effect is not just the resurrection of thought, but

the re-creation of prayer and indeed, the *very admiration of mindfulness*, in the dimension of the hyperbolic. There is a resurrection but it is more like the posthumous life of the new poverty of philosophy, beyond the self-certainty of Hegelian absolute knowing. It is a new exodus into the excess of darkness of unsurpassable greatness of the divine light. No holistic logic could encompass this, since it is not only beyond all wholes, but determines them all as finally finite, and indeed as idols, when they take themselves to be God. Even the Whole of wholes, when thus taken, is an idol, or counterfeit double, not God.

Notes

- 1 In *LPR* Hegel not only says that philosophy is the study of unity, but recurs to the systematic consideration, derived from Hölderlin's speculation about Sein and Urteil: The One as self-differentiating (*LPR*, 129). The whole of philosophy is nothing but a study of the definition of *unity*; and likewise the philosophy of religion is just a succession of unities, where the unity always [abides] but is continually becoming more determinate (*LPR*, 127–8).
- 2 'In thinking an object, I make it into thought and deprive it of its sensuous aspect; I make it into something that is directly and essentially mine. Since it is in thought that I am first by myself, I do not penetrate an object until I understand it; it then ceases to stand over against me and I have taken from it the character of its own which it has in opposition to me' (*PR*, § 7, A). 'The ego is thought and so the universal. When I say I, I eo ipso abandon my particular characteristics, my disposition, natural endowment, knowledge and age. The ego is quite empty, a mere point, simple, yet active in its simplicity. The variegated canvas of the world is before me; I stand over against it; but in my theoretical attitude to it I overcome the opposition to me and make its content my own. I am at home with the world when I know it, still more so when I have understood it', *ibid.*
- 3 See Desmond (1994).
- 4 See the very important discussion in the *Encyclopedia Logic* (*Enz*, § 81–2) on dialectical and speculative reason.
- 5 I can only mention it here but a remark would be apropos on Hegel's *Speculative Satz* in the *Phenomenology* (see, *PhG*, 48ff., *PS*, § 58ff.). He takes as his illustration (*PhG*, 51, *PS*, § 62): God is Being. We find an indeterminacy of the subject without the predicate; then the exit of the subject into the showing of the predicate; and then the recoil of the predicate on the subject; this is the return to the subject, through its own other and shown predicate. We find a dynamic of self, self-othering and self-return; determinacy, indeterminacy, self-determination. Thus we find no simple univocal assertoric proposition such as seems to be the concern of formal logic. Having passed through the movement of the speculative sentence, we do not have the dyadic s-p, but the triadic s(s-p), mirroring what I say about S(S-O). Recall how being is the empty indeterminacy in Hegel's system. See Surber (1975).
- 6 See *Enz*, § 15. On holistic immanence and epistemology, see Rockmore *Hegel's Circular Epistemology* (1986). This holistic immanence is proving attractive to thinkers like Robert Brandom.
- 7 See, for instance, Marx (1975), Flay (1984).
- 8 Among admirers and readers of Hegel there are some whose connaturality is for the *Phenomenology* and some whose bent is for the *Science of Logic*. I think this might be also reflected in the philosophy of God. The first will be more engaged with the

existential struggle to be in relation to the divine; the second will focus on the speculative theology in which existential struggle dwindles to nothing. We need both. We cannot engage in the second speculation without thoroughgoing honesty about the first struggle. Otherwise, it all becomes a dialectical game of spiritless spirit, with categories that answer the conceits of our higher cleverness but that are empty. Finite humans are always in the first situation and when they attempt the second it cannot be in forgetfulness of the first. A great question concerns how we get from the first to the second. This is the matter of the speculative protocols in addressing God – in this case, whether speculative dialectic has the philosophical tact to make the address properly. I think we need more metaxological discernment, more honesty about the meaning of our middle condition. Then there is less risk of faking what we attempt speculatively at the extremities of that middle condition. I think Hegel counterfeits the middle condition, hence does get quite right either the existential struggle or the speculative address.

- 9 See Desmond (1995b) on agapeic mind.
- 10 In the *Phenomenology* the fulfillment of the truth of self-consciousness is *not effected in some solitary or individual mind or consciousness*. This would be a falling back on alienated particularity of finitude. The truth of the relating of self-consciousness extends to the whole. So Hegel moves from consciousness to self-consciousness to reason and spirit. But reason and spirit develop the triadic unifying relation which is offered in the breakthrough of self-consciousness. They bring self-consciousness into a higher form of minded relation to the whole of reality. While we cannot pause over the details here, it is the entire becoming of history that now provides the stage in and on which the completion of the triadic-unifying relation is enacted: in culture, in morality, in ethical life, and most especially in religion. This is the penultimate form of spirit before absolute knowing, hence the most rich presupposition of the final breakthrough into the acme of thinking thinking thinking ($3=1$), philosophical science. In the discussion of religion here, some of the strains we discovered in Hegel's early writings, especially between Athens and Jerusalem, Greek religion and Christianity, are enacted (Yovel (1998) notes the specific silence with respect to the Jews). There is little of the wavering we saw earlier. Hegel runs right through to Christianity, passing Greek paganism in the process. But the sirens do not call him as they did the younger man. He has seen the goal and does not hesitate. For the goal revealed to him both the problem and the solution, the despair and the salvation.
- 11 Again I do not forget that this absolute subjectivity is 'inter'subjectivity, as we shall see in later chapters on trinity, spirit, community. I will have something to say about the nature of the 'inter'. Between what and what, who and who, God and what other?
- 12 See Desmond (1987); the penultimate section in chapter 8.
- 13 See also *Enz*, § 36, 77, 193.
- 14 'Pure self-recognition in absolute otherness', *Das Reine Selbsterkennen im absoluten Anderssein* (*PhG*, 24; *PS*, 14, Hegel's emphasis): a phrase sometimes cited by admirers of Hegel who want to defend his claims to 'preserve' otherness. '(On recognition see Siep (1979) and Williams (1992, 1997).)' 'Absolute otherness': there you have it, in the words of the master himself. Notice, however, the recognition is *self-recognition*, *pure self-recognition*. And what then is so absolute about the otherness? Clearly the most important stress for Hegel is not on the otherness but on the pure *self-recognition*. The absolute otherness is its own otherness (that is, the otherness of the self itself), and hence is owned otherness that makes pure *self-recognition* possible. The absolute otherness is an absolved otherness that is a passage way or medial otherness through which the self passes to pure self-recognition. Here is how Hegel describes God (*LPR*, 453): 'God is the one who as living spirit distinguishes himself from himself, posits an other and in the other remains identical with himself, has in this other his identity with

himself.' Commentators, like Williams (1992, 1997), rightly remind us of the importance of recognition for Hegel, but they remain strategically mum about Hegel's monism when we think in terms of the whole. Think of moving back behind the camera recording the scene in a film, and how other than the scene looks when we open up the fuller horizon. We can stay involved in the scene of recognition, but if, as it were, we step back from that scene, and contextualize it within the Hegelian sense of the whole, and the basic logic that keeps on recurring in all the parts of that whole, we see that Hegel is the more consistent with his own logic in speaking of pure *self*-recognition, and what follows from that for him, namely that there is no 'absolute otherness'. I think that a truer speaking of 'absolute otherness' could not be modelled on any circular process of holistic self-recognition in otherness, which is not to say we have to cling to a dyadic dualistic model: doubling, redoubling, creation, as other. I will give some more hints on this in the next chapter.

- 15 Spinoza, as cited in Gullan-Whur (2000), 119: 'Nature herself is God under another name, and our ignorance of the power of God is co-extensive with our ignorance of nature ... Nothing happens in nature which does not follow from her laws.' And: 'It is nonsense, bordering on madness, to hold that extended Substance is composed of parts or bodies really distinct from one another ... If there were different substances which were not related to a single being, then their union would be impossible. Bodies are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance ... If we proceed in this way we shall easily conceive the whole of Nature as one Individual, whose parts, i.e. all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change in the whole Individual.'
- 16 Aquinas's criticism of Anselm seems to point to something reminiscent of the dyadic epistemology of Kant: God's necessary existence is known *per se* by God himself, by none other. The ontological argument would work if we had knowledge of God's essence or quiddity; but we lack that; hence the only arguments available for us are from effect to cause, hence *a posteriori* ones. His intent is not unlike that of Kant with regard to preserving divine transcendence to finite knowing. One sees the point: only God's knowing is on a par with God's being. Yet without endorsing Hegel, one wonders if Aquinas's response, like Kant's, does justice to the issue of Augustinian immanence. I would put the latter thus: transcendence as excess of the divine within the immanence of the intimate soul, and 'in' its self-transcendence; transcendence as 'above', superior to immanent interiority, in interiority itself, understood by the ontological way as 'inferior', that is, always 'below' a divine height which is above and beyond it, in intimate immanence itself, that is, the idiot soul. The humility of the latter is in accord with the humility that Thomistic 'agnosticism' recommends. Augustinian immanence is as devoted to thinking the difference between human and divine, as is Thomist exteriority in the movement from effect to cause. The Augustinian way is more overtly attuned to the Platonic way of desire, eros and the 'subject'; the Thomist more to the 'objectivities' of Aristotelian causality and substance. There is a contrast here also of *sapientia* and *scientia*. The former need a more fully dialectical, that is, metaxological way. But Hegelian dialectic is more obsessed with scientific necessity than with sapiential finesse; or perhaps with a science that putatively includes *sapientia* in inclusive self-determining knowing; thus Hegel's claim in his *Phenomenology* (*PhG*, 12; *PS*, § 5) to convert the love of knowing into actual science, *wirkliches Wissen*, in the true shape of scientific system (*wissenschaftliche System*). But this is to invert the relation, and to lead to the loss of sapiential finesse, even in the dialectical virtuosity, itself now less than fully open dialectically to the intermediation of same and other, in human knowing, and in the relation of God and finitude as other to God. Aquinas's finesse was sustained with respect to life as *prayer*, deeper than any scientific determination. One thinks here

also of Aquinas's view that being *qua* being is the subject of metaphysics, hence God is not the subject of metaphysics. Metaphysics deals with *ens commune*; but God is *esse subsistens*. There is the absolute uniqueness of God beyond *ens commune*, and hence beyond metaphysics. God is beyond being in one sense, but not in another (*esse subsistens*). There is a connection here to the thought of God beyond the whole, beyond the between. On Aquinas's finessing of Aristotle, on the subject of metaphysics, see Wippel (2000), 11ff., 122, 593.

17 See Desmond (1999a).

18 See Plotinus on the One above thought thinking itself: one does not have to be an Augustinian to see the point. Between Augustine and Plotinus is the issue of the 'personal' or 'impersonal' character of the One, and whether the revelations claimed by Jews and Christians exceed the philosophical terms of the flight of the alone to the Alone. On the crucial point of the excessive transcendence of the One, Plotinus and Augustine are at one, and not Hegelians.

Chapter 4

Hegel's Trinity and the Erotic Self-Doubling God

The Trinity That Overreaches

Does the template of self-determination through one's own other function in Hegel's speculation about God as trinity? Do we again witness a logic of holistic immanence? If so, how? And how also does the question of the counterfeit double arise here? These questions guide us here, the last question being especially hard to address.

Undoubtedly Hegel's speculations about the trinity are of importance for a number of reasons. There is the obvious one for philosophical theology: Hegel purports to give an account of the immanent life of the divine, one which claims its religious warrant in the Christian understanding. It is true that in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* he refers less to the speculations of the Church Fathers as to the Pythagoreans, the Platonists, the Gnostics, Philo (Hegel: 'The German Proclus' Thus Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, 47). He especially praises Boehme for *everywhere* seeing the immanence of the trinity.¹

Then there is the audacity of this, a kind of intellectual chutzpah: the trinity is traditionally reserved as a revealed mystery, definitely not the kernel or cornerstone of a system of speculative reason. Were the audacity of this ambition realized, the claim confirmed, speculative reason would not only seem to be on a par with the mystery, religiously speaking, but also to transcend it in providing the logical and conceptual tools to make comprehensive rational sense of it. Hegel clearly makes the latter claim, in that while he (dis)ingenuously admits that though some things are mysteries for our understanding, this is only true for the *Verstand*, not for speculative *Vernunft*. Finite *Verstand*, with its dyadic logic, must bog down in mystery; speculative *Vernunft* never does since it transcends dyadic logic. The rationale of the 'mystery', its logos, is available to *Vernunft*, the faculty of the infinite, and Hegel is at hand to make this plain. At once Hegel presents the hyperbole of the rationalist, and poses as *defensor fidei* in guaranteeing the inner intelligibility of faith's most cherished mysteries.²

There is also the important fact that Hegel thinks no intelligible sense can be made of any unity if there is not internal mediation marking it. This is his rejoinder to Parmenides: let him affirm the absolute whole, but if this is just absolutely homogeneous, no intelligible claims can be made about it, for there are no immanent differentiations that mark out its inherent intelligibility. (The point has application to Spinoza's one Substance also, as not yet Subject.) Without this immanent self-differentiation or internal mediation, no intelligible claims can be made and we have Schelling's *Indifferenzpunkt*, the intriguing night in which all cows are black.

Not surprisingly, Hegel is attracted to the trinitarian claim as signaling a move beyond homogenous monism to an internally self-differentiating absolute. The immanent life of the divine can be accounted for according to an intelligible logic that is articulated by the immanent dynamism of the speculative concept. Think here also of the metaphor, better, *Vorstellung* he uses to describe his *Wissenschaft der Logik*: God's thoughts before the creation of nature and finite spirit. But the logic itself is no *Vorstellung*. It is the immanent self-determining life of the absolute itself.

A perusal of Hegel's account of the different religions, from rudimentary nature religions of magic through the other determinate religions, to Christianity, reveal Humanity's increasing realization of the internal complexity and self-differentiation of the One. The immediate unity of pantheisms is more and more superseded, without loss of absolute unity, in a diversity of mediations between the human and divine in which richer and richer forms of internal self-mediations are felt to mark the life of the divine, even to the absolute whole which includes the divisions and alienations of finite life. This is an important point in Hegel's account. It not only tilts him towards privileging Christianity in his speculative narrative, but it crucially qualifies his version of the trinitarian immanence. This is not merely an account of the immanent life of the divine, considered as a (triadic self-relating) One *beyond* finitude. Quite to the contrary, this increasingly rich and complex self-concretion, self-differentiation and self-communication of the One is such as to *overreach the seeming otherness of finite life*.

That is, his trinitarian concept has as much to do with how we are to view creation, history and its human communities, whether spiritual or secular, as with speculative accounts of the inner life of the divine, considered in itself. While there is an immanent self-mediation in the life of the divine, in a sense there is no merely inner divine life, for that life is to be outside of itself in creating time, in creating *itself* in creating time. And by thus being outside of itself, it comes to be more fully at home or at one with itself, in both nature and history as the *media* of its own self-othering and self-gathering. This overreaching of the difference of the immanent life of the divine, and the divine in relation to finitude as an other, marks a trinitarian unity that is the more inclusive Whole of wholes that includes all differences, finite and infinite, within itself.

Our first consideration – and this will occupy us in this chapter – will concern more the purported *immanent* life of the divine in its eternity *per se*. This is only an abstraction for Hegel, finally. Our further considerations in subsequent chapters will concern creation, as beginning the apparent move into otherness; and then will bear on history, evil, spirit, hence on human communities, whether spiritual or secular, and all these as *not* outside the divine life, for Hegel, but as more complete expressions of its absolute immanence.

This last point is important in reminding us that Hegel's later speculative theology, if we can call it that, does not intend to be some high haze, or Marxist-denominated 'mystification'. The ethical-political emphasis of his early 'theological' concerns is by no means forgotten:³ the difference of inner and outer speculatively abrogated, and the difference overcome between the 'beyond' and the here and now, Hegel's immanent trinity overwrites his vision of a modern community of freedom. And this community is to be understood, not only religiously, but in terms of the

institutions of the modern state and its embodiment of freedom as immanent social self-determination. The richer complexity of the later understanding might initially obscure this long continuity, but the communitarian immanence of his trinitarian god has secular implications, some of which are of more moment for him than any 'purely' religious concerns. They seem to point to 'post-religious' possibilities. Bear in mind that if Hegel's trinity is overreaching in the sense just implied, our discussions in the chapters to follow, on creation, on history, on spirit and community, are simply immanent continuations and holistic completions of Hegel's trinitarian overreaching and self-return.

Unitary-Triadic Self-Relating and its Religious Representation

Recall again previous discussion of the contrast of consciousness and self-consciousness, for the light it throws on the form of relation crucial for how Hegel thinks God as absolute (inter)subjectivity, and as trinitarian. If consciousness is characterized by the dyadic relation of S-O (self-other, subject-object), self-consciousness can be represented as either a *triadic relation* or an *inclusive unitary relation*: S(S-O). S(S-O) is a triadic relation in the sense that there seem to be three terms, even if two seem the same: Self(self-other); Subject(subject-object). The relation of self-other is itself the object of consciousness in self-consciousness, hence self-consciousness includes in itself the relation between self and other as defined by consciousness. And so in that sense, it is an inclusive unitary relation, for the including power of self-consciousness is now explicit as comprehending within itself the relation between subject and object, self-other. The 'between' or 'inter' is not a dyadic relation between self and other. This between is included in the more comprehensive self-mediating power of the unitary-triadic relation of S(S-O). The inclusive S becomes the absolute power of mediating which claims to include within itself the intermediation between self and other, subject and object. If there is an (absolute) middle, this between, or 'inter', is the absolute power of inclusive (inter)subjectivity to mediate all otherness within itself and so to mediate absolutely with itself through that otherness.⁴

This logos of S(S-O) is not to be viewed as merely 'subjective' for Hegel. As including a relation to external objectivity it shows, so to say, the more ultimate 'objectivity' of inclusive 'subjectivity'. We deal not only with thought about being, but with being as thought, and with thought as being. If this is so, Hegel can also shift to a more ontological logic in using other triads such as universality, particularity and individuality; or indeterminacy, determination and self-determination; or again immediate unity, difference (as self-differentiation) and self-mediated unity. And the shift will reveal variations of the same unitary-triadic self-relation.

In any case, a way opens for Hegel to claim to be a trinitarian thinker, as well as a thinker of the absolute One. Here – just to take S(S-O) – we seem to have a trinitarian relativity in which there is no otherness outside it, since the other and the relation to the other seems to have been included in the self-relation of consciousness to itself that is self-consciousness.⁵ Might we call the position something like *trinitarian monism*? Is it *trinitarian monotheism*? Not if by monotheism we preclude the absolute unification of God and creation, affirm the irreducible transcendence

of God (T3), and the irreducible difference of finite creation which can never *be* God. One can be monotheistic without being monistic.

In speaking of trinitarian monism, I do not forget Hegel's *communitarian* view. We will come later to this and the 'inter', but we stress here that community is a *self-communication* of the One: the One as trinitarian seems to be both source of communication, and the ultimate addressee. You might say: absolute subjectivity is absolute inter-subjectivity; communication is between, *inter*, the absolute subject and itself, in the form of its own otherness. Theologically, God communicates with God in the self-mediation of the whole. This trinitarian monism is absolutely inclusive, overreaching both the immanent mediated life of the Godhead, but also the relation of God to the finite creation. The inclusive (unitary) trinitarian self-relation is the absolute life. It is absolute as having granted otherness but as yet absolving the otherness from dualistic opposition. It is absolute as embracing otherness in the fuller life of the self-relating whole.

Hegel would not say: this is a *model* taken from finite life which I apply to the divine; a finite metaphor of the absolute. He cannot do that, for such a strategy would necessarily entail a gap between finite and infinite. Rather he must say: this *is* the divine life, and no (mere) metaphor of it, no (mere) representation of it. It comprehends the energy of divine life itself. For a holistic God, otherness is no otherness at all. Nor can the otherness between God and creation be final, since this otherness cannot be irreducibly 'between' the two, since it is included in the absolute holistic process. The difference between God and creation, and this other-being of creation is included in the absolute self-relating of the triadic whole. Have we not seen how, for Hegel, religion is all about this: overcoming the otherness of human and divine, elevating the human to the divine, and so conquering their most radical dis-union? The 'between' is not otherwise understood by him: as *not* included as a *moment* of God's *own* self-mediation, as *giving to be* a community between God and creation defined by a different *intermediation* beyond holistic self-mediation.

But let us try to put some religious flesh on this. Here are some main points Hegel makes in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.⁶ Christianity provides his point of reference. It is the consummate religion, for not only does it come to know God as absolute subject and as *Geist*, it also transcends the undifferentiated immediacies of oriental pantheisms. It transcends the immediate aesthetic reconciliations or artistic holism of Greek religion, for Christianity witnesses to the sense of the infinite inwardness associated with suffering and death. It surpasses also the external dualism of Jewish transcendence and sublimity by bearing witness to the immanence of God in time and in creation with the incarnation of God in man. Hence it knows the final overcoming of the alienation between them, and unhappiness between them, for God is no longer 'beyond', but is 'all in all'. The Whole of wholes is all in all, and within its unsurpassable embrace the divine and the human are reconciled with each other and themselves.⁷

Yet Hegel is clearly intent to show that prefigurings of something like his sense of inclusive trinitarian self-relating in religions other to Christianity. I note his claim that the Hindu Trimurti has trinitarian elements, though significantly it is not a true trinity for Hegel, since it lacks what is most needed for ultimate completeness, which is the third moment of *self-return*.⁸ And so it is triadic process without being

inclusively self-relating and self-determining. I note also Hegel's emphasis on the *self-determination* of God in Judaism: this self-determination is a real step forward, but unfortunately its absoluteness is projected into a 'beyond', and the speculative move to the inclusive whole as the true self-determining of God is stymied, and we remain at a dyadic standpoint. The true trinity is this inclusive self-determining which overreaches the (dyadic) difference of God and creation and in the process of returning to itself constitutes its own consummate completeness. This alone is recognized in Christianity, though again it is notable that Hegel makes reference to the *philosophers* and some *heterodox* sources to make the point about triadic thinking: thus the Pythagoreans with preference to the importance of 3, Plato, the Gnostics, and Philo.⁹ Orthodoxy does not bother Hegel, in that the truth comes from where it will, and not necessarily from the sanctioned oracles. Well and good, yet Hegel does peg his account massively on the Christian trinity, and the representational structure of Father, Son and Spirit, a representational structure that progressively 'deconstructs' representation as we move to spirit.

This is the logic at work. Humans move upwards from immediate unity (religious pantheisms); through divisions (various determinate religions and religious dualisms); to self-mediating unity (aesthetic with Greek religion, spiritual and self-determining with the consummate religion, namely Christianity, and speculative philosophy). God moves down as well as up. In describing the trinity, Hegel offers us the reverse movement: the downwardly directed reorientation of the move upward from division to unity: now 'descent' from immediate unity to division and to mediated unity. And all of this is *first* said to be *within the immanence* of the divine life itself. There is an 'eternal' movement within the self-moving, self-mediating divine life itself. This steers us to what more orthodox have called the 'immanent trinity' (though what immanent here means is not coincident with Hegel's completed immanence).

This is the movement of the concept itself for Hegel: from universality (*Allgemeinheit*) through its own self-specification, self-particularization (*Besonderheit*), to its union of universal and particular in singularity (*Einzelheit*) or the concrete universal. Everything shows in its way the articulation of this self-positing, self-differentiating, self-determining concept. With reference to the consummate religion, God the Father will be correlated with the first, the Son with the second, and with the third, the Spirit will be the concrete universal. The logical rhythm of the trinitarian self-relating unity is represented in the Christian doctrine of Father, Son and Spirit: this is the immanent, eternal self-communication of God with itself. The second moment, the Son, is logically necessary for that self-communication to be completed in the spirit, without which there is no self-return of the absolute whole.

The logical rhythm of the concept is not a matter of three different phases as ultimately *separable*: they are the self-expression of the one life of the absolute, which necessarily takes on this structure, or dynamic structuring. The universal thus must pass over into the particular, that is, must particularize itself. Without passing over, the universal would be a mere indefinite abstraction, an empty universal. In order to have concrete, that is, determinate content it must so pass over. Its initial indefiniteness is then necessitated to pass over into particularity, that is to say, into determinacy. But this passing over is *only itself*: it becomes other to itself but in becoming other, it is becoming itself; for the particular is its own self-particularization,

and hence, while other, is not absolutely other, but itself again. And so there is self-recognition in this other which is not *qua* other absolute.

In this self-recognition, in this understanding that the particular is the self-particularization of the universal, the universal comes to itself, but now in a form that is neither merely indeterminate/indefinite, nor yet just determinate, but as self-determining. It knows that the determinate is just itself, is just then its own self-determination. The indeterminate universal *qua* such a universal is a mere lack or emptiness: but necessarily as being itself as other to itself, it overcomes this its own initial indefiniteness and makes itself, in making itself determinate. It determines itself to be what it concretely is in a self-determination in which there is no external otherness, only the immanence otherness of the One that has determined itself in and through its own otherness.

If the reader has the impression that I have fallen under the hypnosis of the Hegelian way of speaking, this is not quite so. But we do have to grant that this way of speaking is not just mumbo-jumbo. It exhibits its own rationale, and this must be understood if we are to be in any position to see what might be deemed questionable in it all. See then Hegel correlating his account with the trinity. Thus, as the first, God the Father is correlated with the abstract universality which Hegel clearly associates with 'patriarchal' religions such as Judaism and medieval Christianity. Here too the emphasis on transcendence as other is very strong. This makes no final sense for Hegel. It is an empty transcendence, unless and until it determines itself to the determinate and the particular. Christianity does this in naming the Son: Son of God, Son of Man. *Deus sive natura*, so says Spinoza; Hegel might rather say *Deus sive humanitas*, it does not finally matter. His Christianity is already the transcending of (putatively) empty transcendence as other, and already recognition of the necessity of an immanent other for the divine life to be both self-differentiated and concrete. Hegel's speculative trinity just confirms this conceptually.

Note that this 'second moment' has a double aspect for Hegel which has troubled some commentators, for here the blurring of any difference of the 'immanent' (in the more orthodox usage) and the 'economic' trinity seems to occur. By double aspect, I mean Hegel's naming of the second moment of the trinity as Son, immanent within the eternal life of the divine, and as creation, the determinate world of time, seemingly 'outside' eternity entirely immanent to itself. The immanent eternity of God, and God in relation to time: these cannot be absolutely separated for Hegel. What seems like a double aspect is not a double for Hegel, not a double which names irreducible otherness, or transcendence, between God and creation. The double will be the *self-doubling of God*, now eternally effected, now effected in time. And these two self-effectings of God are not two, but are somehow, for Hegel, one.

I would say that, for Hegel, if the absolute immanent self-determination of the triadic self-relating One is *only eternal*, then *qua eternal whole*, it would partake of the indeterminate, hence empty universality of the first moment or Father. And then we could not have the absolute overcoming of the dualism of eternity and time that still vitiates the greatest religious traditions, and that condemns us to repeat the ultimate despair of the unhappy consciousness. This is why I think he insists that the self-particularization of the eternal God *in time* is necessitated by the logic of the concept.

In other words, the second moment, for Hegel, names both the second moment of the immanent life of the trinity: names God in self, self-differentiated into an other that is its own other or Son; and names the moment of difference *between* the Godhead itself and creation as other. The self-differentiation of the universal One is named as both Son, in the immanent trinity, and as creation (the determinate finite world), seemingly beyond the immanent trinity, and ingredient in the so-called 'economic' trinity. The difference of these two does not seem to be of ultimate concern for Hegel, given the inclusive trinitarian monism mentioned above.

I find it interesting that Adam Kadmon is here invoked a few times: the primordial unity of the Son, as the first Adam, primordial humanity, is also first born of the Father. Remember 'Father-Son' is first and foremost for Hegel a *representation*. This is part of its limitation: it is a metaphor enmeshed in *natural generation*. It thus occludes the *spiritual self-determination* of the divinity. Thus the philosopher must be careful about the connotations that go with this representation of generation, namely, a kind of externality of father and son, despite the deep intimacy in flesh. The inherent truth, understood in the immanent self-thinking of the philosophical concept, sees the truth of the representation as a spiritual becoming which is a self-becoming of the One universal. The two-foldness, or doubleness of father and son is potentially *duplicitous*, harboring something deceptive, on this score. What Christianity helps humanity realize is that the two-ness is two and not two: it is the One redoubling itself in the other that, as its most intimate other, is itself. The Son and the Father are one. In going from one to two, we are not going to two as a mere duality, but coming back to one. It is interesting that Hegel gives privilege to Jesus saying 'I and the father are *one*'. He does not give weight to the other transcendence loved in the Lord's prayer: Our father who art in heaven ...¹⁰ Admittedly, millennia of dispute and perplexity (not to mention astonishment) are telescoped in those words 'are one'. The dispute is not ended, nor is the perplexity dispelled by Hegel's sometimes superior air of knowing, itself not generous with agapeic astonishment.

To return to Hegel's account. The conceptual truth is just this eternally enacted energy that moves from itself to its other and in this move returns to itself, eternally. Spirit is the third that returns the second to the first, and hence completes the movement by which the God eternally comes to itself in its own otherness. Spirit is the *love* that binds the first and the second, and makes of the three an inclusive self-relating that knows no alienation, for there is no ultimate *alter*. Trinitarian monism names the absolute self-mediation of the divine in and through its own other: as the self-expression of the unity, it is the self-differentiation of the unity; and as the self-mediation of the unity it is the trinitarian self-communication of the unity with itself. As a thinker at the level of the *Begriff*, Hegel claims to surpass the residual externalities of the representational trinity, and to think the immanent self-communication of the divine: the community of the One and Three, of the One with itself in Three, each a necessary moment of the self-completing One.

Of course, the move to the inclusive trinity must also include in all this, the move to finite creation. This again is where two movements, thought by many as different, would seem to be surpassed as different. If again we use the language of the 'up' and 'down', the first move above describes the immanent self-mediation of the trinity, the second move 'down' seems to describe creation as a relation *between* God and an other that is *not* immanent. Hegel might here say with Hamlet: 'Seems,

madam? I know not seems!' Yet he would not say with Hamlet: 'I have that within which passes show'. Not at all: the 'within' of God is nothing if it does not show, is nothing but self-show. There is nothing within, or above, that passes show, for Hegel. This too is true of the trinity. But then this self-show of God is *nothing but* 'within' – within the one immanent, but absolutely overreaching life of the trinity. And so Hegel's inclusive trinity, as this One, overreaches this appearance of finite creation as not being immanent. Ultimately again, there is no difference between 'way up' and 'way down', for both are within the way of the absolute immanently with itself.

How then account for the true otherness of creation as temporal and not as eternal? Let God's self-movement be eternal, but the self-becoming in time is not thus eternal (even if endless). How account for the difference? Is it enough to see it as an eternally vanishing or sublated moment? How does this accord with our own experience of finitude as intermediate being in the between? Does the homogenization of the difference of 'way up' and 'way down', and the blurring of the difference between the eternal self-mediating of God and the arising of creation as an other in time, make incoherent the relation of time and eternity? Does this plant the seed of deep equivocity in Hegel which can be cultivated differently, for their own purposes, by either right or left Hegelians, the lovers of eternity and the lovers of time?

It is not enough to say Hegel is *both*, for this is just the issue: *how can one be both*, in the terms Hegel gives us? One might not insist on a dualistic either/or, but a dialectic-speculative 'both/and' raises equally troubling questions about the best way to think the togetherness and difference of time and eternity that is true to their community and otherness. Has Hegel's speculative solution merely *renamed*, and so passed quickly over, a radical equivocity here, and not been aware of so doing? Has he then solved the problem by dissolving it, though the dissolution seems to work as either dissolving time in eternity, or eternity in time? Similar issues will come up later from the standpoints of creation, and history, and community in later chapters: poverty of conceptual resources to give due weight to otherness as other, whether the released otherness of finite creation, the negative otherness of evil, or the promise of agapeic otherness that is the endowment of a community of religious service.

Does all this account for the peculiar feeling we sometimes have reading Hegel on the trinity: now he seems to be describing our movement to the God, now the God's movement within Godself, now the movement from the immanence of God's eternal life to the finite world of nature and history? And Hegel seems to slide from one to the other without always sufficiently marking their difference; or without self-consciousness that such a sliding might well elide some really perplexing difficulties, and so falsify or counterfeit our movement to God, or the immanent movement of the Godhead, or the movement between God and the finite creation.

To take but one instance, where Hegel discusses the emergence of absolute spirit with the consummate religion, Christianity. He outlines a process of self-determination in which is realized

the absolute and infinite subjectivity, infinite form. The infinite form is the circuit of this determining process; the concept is spirit only because it has achieved determinacy

through this circuit, has moved through it. This is how it first becomes concrete ... It is spirit only as that which dirempts itself and returns into itself again – i.e. only after traversing this circuit. What we have traversed in our treatment is the becoming, the bringing forth of spirit by itself, and only as such, or as eternally bringing itself forth, is it spirit. (LPR, 411)

All talk of diremption to the contrary, are we falsely worried that all differences here seem to melt into *one grand circuit*, a circuit that sometimes seems eternal and absolutely for itself, sometimes seems temporal and encompassing the self-becoming of humanity in history (for the above comes at the end of an historical unfolding)? If the circuit is *eternal*, what then of the historical determinations of religions, and how does Hegel know its logic? If the circuit is *temporal*, how does Hegel know its eternity? If the circuit is eternal *and* temporal, how can it be a *circuit* at all, if these two are two? If they are not two, then either eternity 'sublates' time, or time 'dissolves' eternity into itself, or perhaps eternity dissolves itself (kenotically?) in time. In all cases, their difference seems destined to vanish, one way or the other. If so, are we not back with Parmenides, with Hegel impotent to speak truly of their *difference*? And if so, is Hegel's speech no speech? Or does he just then equivocally slide between one and the other? Are we wrong to worry that all the moves made, either *within* Godself, or *between* God and finite, in the end amount to *quasi*-moves?

How Here Speak of Counterfeit Doubles of God?

This is an almost impossibly hard question, if what is at stake is human knowing of the immanent nature of the divine. Aquinas said we can know *that* God is, not *what* God is. Hegel claims to know the 'what'. But to make any claims about counterfeit doubles seems equally to imply that one knows something of the original that is not counterfeit. Is this too to know the *what* of God? But what does one know? And what is the *mode* of the knowing? Can one know anything, what can one know, from self-thinking thought? And know anything of God, even if one must enter most intimately the most original source of being and thinking in immanence itself? What would one say – say *philosophically*?

I think one would have to say: in an important sense, one knows nothing directly of the original – the truth of the trinity – against which one can judge whether Hegel's trinity is true or counterfeit. There are qualifications to add. 'Knowing nothing' may be a poverty of philosophy in which something of the richness of the original as other may be communicated, communicated and articulated in terms of the hyperboles of being, that is, happenings of finite being which are rich in significance in an excessive, overdetermined sense. (What this means will be developed in *God and the Between*.)

Just as I cannot make the judgement *simpliciter* – I know the original God – Hegel cannot make the judgment that he, *sed contra*, does know the original. Why? Even were Hegel to say, as he does, *this original shows itself*, what we know of it comes from the show, and so we are *necessarily other* to the original itself. Hence all our knowing, even the most intimate, images the original, but is not it. The

difference of original and image is a condition of the possibility of our knowing it. *Our knowing it is not, and cannot be, a matter of its knowing itself.* Hence it can never be rendered on the model of self-determining knowing. Our difference from the original is itself original in a manner that is *not* the *self-differentiation* of the divine original. We live and move and are mindful in the images, possibilized by the self-show of the original, and in them we seek to glean something of the original, but this (God) *qua* original remains other, and in excess of our determination. In showing itself, it shows its overdetermination, communicated itself in excess of what is *determinately* shown, and so again it is always other to a showing that exhausts it, for the showing itself is also overdeterminate. There is a fullness shown to this poverty of our knowing which it fills, but neither the knowing nor the showing are absolutely determinable as the self-knowing or self-showing of God. There is always the (reserved) otherness of God that is *not* God's self-othering.

It is a cause of wonder that speculative dialectic seems, in the final count, so to qualify the necessity of imagistic knowing (representation), that it elides the functioning of its own discourse about God, and the trinity, on the basis of a deeply rooted *likeness* with self-conscious thought, as known to us in our own thought. Likeness, I say, not identity. One wonders then if the indispensability of the imagistic is dispensed with or suppressed rather than, as is claimed, surpassed. The metaphor, or symbol, or analogy, or hyperbole by which we think the original is decisive, but our thinking must be honest about its own always intermediate condition which remains finite, even if it embodies a self-transcending (T2) to transcendence as other (T3).

I think that it is more at *this* level – concerning faithful mindfulness of the deeply rooted images, or metaphors, hyperboles – that the slide towards counterfeiting can be set in motion. No one can stride together with Hegel into the inner chamber of the absolute original, and compare one's 'image', or 'concept' to the original. This applies as much to Hegel's critic as to Hegel: neither can just say 'I have the true original, you the counterfeit.' The question is put to *both*. Both Hegel and his critic are involved in discerning the images, and in that discerning *seeking to say something true* about the counterfeit and the original. The slippage and potential counterfeiting occurs, in my view, with respect to *the images themselves* that we inhabit: with respect to our attentiveness to *those images* that suggest themselves as most communicating the divine; with respect to faithful mindfulness of *what* lines of communication those images open to the divine original. At this level, a difference can *already* be smudged, or an otherness elided, *before* we come to reflective thought; and what we claim speculatively on that basis about the original itself will be correspondingly smudged or skewed. In fact, the speculative reflection or concept might well compound the smudge or skew.

All this is true, even if Godself has absolutely communicated God. We are in the midst of images; we are ourselves an (extraordinary) image; but we still see through a glass darkly. And we can see differently in the glass, and we can look differently. Hence the issue is not only of seeing the original as other to the glass, but of our mindfulness of the glass itself and what its darkness portends. Moreover, the temptation to elide differences is all the greater when *we ourselves are the dark glass*. If the model of self-determining knowing is absolutized, we are tempted to think that we are the light which dispels this darkness. Then we do not say: 'Divine

self-knowing *is as* human self-knowing.' We say: 'Divine self-knowing *is* (absolute) human self-knowing.' In fact, say what we will, we are still the dark glass, and the light we shed itself shares in that darkness, and hence cannot be the absolutely self-illuminating light it may claim itself to be. This claim to absolute knowing is itself a darkness, and in that respect, it is a counterfeit absolute knowing. We seem to speak of human knowing, but if we say that this *is* divine knowing, the claim of absolute light is doubly dark to itself: dark as eliding the shift from 'as' to 'is'; dark as forgetting that we have just shifted the dark glass from ourselves to God.

The poverty of philosophy here returns us to an ontologically elemental level in which the ultimate loves of the human being are at stake. The question of God is indeed extraordinarily elemental. It is the question of what we love as ultimate. It turns out, in fact, that what we love as ultimate already participates in a love of what is ultimate that constitutes our being at all. To be is to be in an ontological love of being, the love of the 'to be' as good. The question of God is inseparable from mindfulness of that love, and the discerning of what it betokens.

Overall, Hegel's concept of the immanent life of the divine reflects the metaphysical metaphor of an *erotic absolute*. Its contrast with the metaphor or hyperbole of an agapeic absolute will be instructive, especially since traces of the younger Hegel's concern with *love* resurface relative to the spirit as the binding of love that constitutes the self-mediating communication of the Father and the Son (see *ETW*, 292; *Nohl*, 334). A failure in properly discerning different forms of love may affect our understanding of forms of transcendence, and forms of relation, as well as the metaphysical metaphors that speculatively mediate our image of the divine. First some remarks on what this erotic metaphor here implies, and below I will ask, by contrast, what might an agapeic trinitarianism look like.

Trinitarian Self-Mediation as Erotic Self-Doubling

Eros has been called a god by some, a daimon by others, but it can be taken as a possible metaphysical metaphor for the being of God. One way to think of eros is as a dynamic movement (of desire) seeking fulfilment, concretizing a process of self-transcendence: an ecstatic movement out of self towards the other. Erotic selfing stands out of its own fixed identity towards what is other, and does so to seek in the other its self more completely. Note a unity that exceeds itself, but that is also self-related through the other. One sees thus something of the triadic self-relating unity. There is also a certain indeterminacy in eros in the sense of an openness to self-becoming. The beginning of that opening might be seen in terms of a lacking (as it is by Diotima, for instance), beyond which eros is directed, the overcoming of which confers some fulfilling completion. The lacking indeterminacy of the beginning is overcome in the end, through the appropriation of the other in the middle, which other serves ultimately for purposes of self-appropriation. A circle of inclusive self-relation is traversed in which the ruptures of otherness are appropriated as means to mediate a fulfilled unity with self.

The suggestiveness of the erotic metaphors can be correlated with certain metaphysical possibilities, viewed here in a historical light. In premodern thought, this metaphors might describe *our* metaphysical movement to God or the One,

but the One or God itself was *beyond* need. It would be a study in itself to show the widespread use of the metaphors in modernity but this use is not accidental. For Platonic dualism, and any related speculative metaphysics, has been interpreted in modernity as destining us to an impasse, expressed in the sclerosis of transcendence (T3) into a static eternity, unrelated to the negative condition of finite, desiring being. This seems to undercut the relation of God to finite being, making unintelligible the movement of it towards the finite creation, or indeed of the finite towards it, except by finitude's own self-negation.

By contrast, an erotic metaphors seems to *immanentize* the work of transcendence (T3). We do not have to negate the world to think original transcendence. Thus too erotic metaphors seems more attractive than the stony impassivity of the eternal, ascribed to Greek metaphysics. The stony eternity of such a catatonic god would seem unable to generate anything other than itself, even had it desire to do so, given its pure self-sufficiency, unaffected by anything, not even itself. Then there is the influence of Jewish-Christian God as actively involved in history. This God is not an absentee absolute. We are inclined to repudiate 'otherworldly' transcendence, accusing the Middle Ages of this flight, again in favor of an immanent transcendence. And then too in Hegel's own time, we find growing dissatisfaction with the anorexic abstraction of God that is the deistic divinity. The erotic absolute, by contrast, is continuous with the pantheistic divinization of nature so influential from the late eighteenth century. Finally, the stress on historical progress seemed also well served by a God itself becoming complete. The thrust of eros towards a future perfection seeks the plenitude of the absolute, not in the beginning, but in the consummation coming at the end, the omega point.¹¹

The dialectical-speculative God of Hegel strongly suggests this metaphors of erotic being. But notice one contrast with Platonism and Neoplatonism: in the latter the *ascent* of finite being to the One may be likened to an erotic seeking; but the *descent* by the One is usually described in terms of the *overflow of an origin* that needs nothing. Hegelianism is a more thoroughgoing speculative monism in homogenizing this asymmetry of the movement down. For Hegel, as we have seen, the movement up and the movement down seem not to be two different movements, but two expressions of a singular movement of eternally circular motion. Hegel's God is an erotic absolute in this sense: the origin in itself, if taken for itself alone, is a lacking condition of being, all but indistinguishable from nothing. (This Christianity represents as 'Father'.) To be itself, the erotic origin must become itself, and it becomes itself concretely by its self-othering both in itself (determines itself immanently as the Son: the 'immanent' trinity), and into the world of finiteness (determines itself as creation and history: the 'economic' trinity). In this other(s), this self-othering(s), it recognizes itself: communicates itself to itself, and so comes to itself as spirit. The circle seems closed in the eternal immanent life of the trinitarian God, but eternal immanence is never absolutely closed. Otherwise the relation to temporal immanence would be closed off. Only by erotically overreaching the finitude of temporal immanence is it, for Hegel, the fulfilled absolute of holistic immanence. As we will see more fully in the next chapter with 'creation', the finite other, for Hegel, is not for itself irreducibly; as a *self-othering* of the origin, it is for the origin, and its concrete self-constitution. Relativity to the other serves self-

relation. From the standpoint of the Hegelian absolute, which self-mediate both its eternal and temporal self-completing, there is no movement up or down but just the one absolute circular movement.

Asymmetries of the Agapeic Full: Counting to Two and the Question of the Fourth

There are sentences where Hegel speaks of the eternal self-mediating life of the divine as love. For instance, in speaking of reconciliation, he refers to antithesis in God: '... the antithesis arises eternally and just as eternally sublates itself; there is at the same time eternal reconciliation' (*LPR*, 453). And speaking of the Son as other to the Father: 'This otherness is what eternally posits and eternally sublates itself; the self-positing and sublating of otherness is love or spirit' (*LPR*, 454). Recall my earlier remarks in chapter 1 about the young Hegel and love, and my claim that we need a more differentiated sense of the different loves to be true here. Hegel's lack of these more *systematic* resources seems not to have been significantly remedied since his early writing, to go on what he says here. He comes closest to touching on something that might remind one of agapeic love when he speaks thus (*LPR*, 418):

When we say, 'God is love,' we are saying something very great and true. But it would be senseless to grasp this saying in a simple-minded way as a simple definition, without analyzing what love is. For love is the distinguishing of two, who nevertheless are absolutely not distinguished for each other. The consciousness or feeling of the identity of the two – to be outside of myself and in the other – this is love. I have my self-consciousness not in myself but in the other. I am satisfied and have peace with myself only in this other – and I *am* only because I have peace with myself; if I did not have it, I would be a contradiction that falls to pieces. This other, because it likewise exists outside itself, has its self-consciousness only in me, and both the other and I are only this consciousness of being-outside-ourselves and of our identity; we are only this intuition, feeling, and knowledge of our unity. This is love, and without knowing that love is both a distinguishing and a sublation of the distinction, one speaks emptily of it. This is the simple, eternal idea.

While 'being outside self' and in the other is here named, the fuller meaning of that ecstasis in its agapeic form is not described, and the recurrent stress on identity, unity and sublated distinction clearly indicate that what Hegel describes as love is closer to what I have spoken of as an erotic self-transcending in which the self comes to itself in and through its mediation with the other. The unsuspecting reader might anticipate something like a flicker of the agape of the immanent divine, but the subtler sinuosities of what might be involved in the different loves find no voice here. The form of love is peace with self through the other or, more generally, mediated self-return in one's own other in which distinction, first posited, is sublated. This is continuous with the kind of trinitarian logic recommended by Hegel, and again it shows Hegel's holistic immanence as undiscerning about forms of otherness beyond self-mediated otherness. Despite a flicker here and there, Hegel's ecstasis of love remains asleep to the agape of God.

Suppose that we do have an erotic trinity with Hegel; suppose the trinity must mediate with itself because of a 'lack' or indeterminacy in the origin (Father), must determine itself as other (Son), must become itself as absolute whole in the spirit; then we can still say there is a *community* here, but it is self-communication which the 'communally' self-mediating spirit shows. And indeed this dynamism from 'lack' to 'fullness' is not completely fulfilled in the immanent *eternal* trinity, but the latter is itself 'lacking' without its becoming of itself in time through 'creation' which is self-creation. Here this trinitarian God becomes *immanent* in a sense more recognizable to us who dwell in history. But it seems the move from eternity to time is driven by the same erotic logic: eternity is an empty indeterminacy till it determines itself in the particularities of time, and through the appropriation of these determinacies becomes fully itself as self-determining. The modern state of freedom is the spirit as completing itself in time.

What if our metaphysical metaphor or hyperbole were the *agapeic*? This too would allow for self-transcending being, hence be ecstatic and communicative like *eros*. But the self-transcending and communication would proceed from surplus rather than lack; from plenitude rather than from an indeterminacy yet to be made determinate; from an overdeterminacy of transcendence itself as other to finite determination, yet as possibilizing the other being of finitude, and possibilizing it as a full release into its own being for itself. For is this not what *agapeic* love does: releases the other as other and for the sake of its otherness as other, and not for mediated purposes of its return to the origin? Releases the free gift of the being there of the other, and as given otherness gifted with the promise of a community *between* itself and the divine source? This between would not be the self-mediation of the divine, or the creation, but an intermediation in good between the two. Otherness, plurality, community would all be qualified differently in this gift of the *agapeic* origin, and show the promise of free intermediations beyond any form of self-mediation, including the self-mediation of God with God.

Much more could be said, and I have tried elsewhere to say some other relevant things. But here I ask: what if we thought of the trinity in terms of the metaphor/hyperbole of *agapeic* transcending? Beyond the self-communication from initially lacking indeterminacy, through determinacy, to self-recognition and self-determination, we would have to speak rather of *communication from fullness to fullness to fullness*. The excessive good of the gift of the first, given to the second out of fullness not diminished by being given and the recipient, the second, as itself surplus fullness of good, not less, not more than the first; and the third the fullness recognized as spirit, itself overgoodness, or surplus. We have infinitely communicative good from overfullness to overfullness to overfullness: from pluperfection to pluperfection to pluperfection; not from 'imperfection' to perfection. And if we have an *agapeic* community, it is a symmetrical *agape* in that there is a mutual recognition, but with respect to surplus good: communicative good as infinite, hence beyond any determinable whole. This *agapeic* community would be, in a sense, a divine *philia* in respect of symmetrical giving and receiving of the full, of the hyperfull. But with respect to finite being, the asymmetry of the surplus good is not at all to be surpassed. This superplus good would be the God beyond the whole.

In the terms of Father, Son and Spirit, what would it look like? It would not look like Hegel's trinity. Father as origin and surplus good is overdetermined; Son as

expression of the surplus good is also overdetermined; Spirit as communal intermediation, or the love of this secret life of the surplus good, is also overdetermined. No holistic logic of self-completing self-determination will do justice to this excessive communication from full to full to full: from overfull to overfull to overfull. This agapeic God is overwhole. The overfull is in the origin, hence there is no lacking indefiniteness needing determinacy, and mediating its self-determination. Too much of transcendence in the origin is communicated to the second, itself expressing goodness more than determinate, hence inexhaustible. And this living surplus good is broadcast and affirmed in the third, itself overdeterminate, and hence too as creative power that possibilizes determinate, finite being in the most radical sense: giving it to be in a radical coming to be that is not at all a becoming or self-becoming. What comes to be in finitude is itself always other than, in excess of, all determination and self-determination. We are not speaking hence of the Whole of wholes, but of the overwhole God, hence infinite beyond all wholes. And of course, everything thus said is hyperbolic, but there is a proper sense of hyperbole that is most needed in venturing to speak of this God beyond the whole. More forms of asymmetry with respect to otherness and fullness will return in chapters to come.

Have I described the 'within' of the trinity? Who would be so rash? Hegel? Yet what is suggested by the hyperbole of agapeic love highlights something different to what we see if the erotic is the metaphysical metaphor molding our sense of the ultimate. These loves, for humans, have to be discerned in the midst of the images, as well as in and between humans as their own deepest promise of transcendence. The hyperbole returns us also to something elemental, even childlike, when we pause and wonder on the basis of our experience of the world and ourselves: what might God be like? Instead of the too univocally assertoric 'That is God', the venture will be to say 'God might be like this.'

This 'might be like' bears also on the relation *between* trinity and finite creation. Hegel will not tolerate any unsurpassable 'might be like', since it betokens an otherness 'beyond'. He would make further claims beyond this 'between' which defines the difference of God and creature, while being the medium of their communication. His desire to surpass the 'might be like' is shown in how Hegel's erotic trinity overlaps the otherness of creation by its necessitated *overreach into immanent time*. One could say, then, that the contrast of the erotic and agapeic trinity brings us to what we might call the question of *the fourth*. Aristotle says that the least number, properly speaking, is two. Can Hegel count to two? But does he not count to three? Yes, it seems. But is it not also so that, in counting to two, the second is the first self-doubled, and the third is the self-recognition of the first in the second? In counting to three, is he not still just counting to one? Does he then really count to two at all? In order to count to two, must we count to *four*, such that if there is self-doubling, there is more than one such 'self', and hence a different redoubling that pluralizes beyond one?

The question of the fourth is that of *creation*. This concerns *creation as other* to the self-mediation of the divine as immanent in itself. Does that otherness mark a genuine plurality more than the self-pluralization of the One? Does it also mark a community *between* creation as other and that divinity? Is there a 'fourth', not itself divine, but naming the milieu of finite being within which we happen to be?

Is the happening of finite being as given other to the divine life itself? Is creation a name for the ontological communication between God and finitude, communication that is not the abrogation of the difference but its crossing or traversal in love? Is it divine eros or divine agape that defines this traversal? Love that seeks itself in the other? Or love that gives the surplus good of being and for the other as other? The question of creation is also the question of the divine love of contingency.

Notes

- 1 Some theologians are not convinced that Hegel knew much about the Church Fathers (see Chapelle, 1964–1971). See *Lectures on History of Philosophy* (Hegel, 1892–96, vol. 3, 188–216) for the remarkably extensive discussion of Boehme ‘the first German philosopher’, as Hegel calls him. Boehme is especially important in the interpretation of O’Regan (1994); see also his new important books on Gnosticism, O’Regan (2001, 2002). On Hegel and the trinity, see Splett (1965), Schmidt (1982), Huber (1984), Schlitt (1984, 1990).
- 2 It is remarkable that there is no reference to thinkers like Augustine and his great work, *De Trinitate*. Some trinitarian conceptions, like Augustine’s (memory, word, will), or Aquinas’s (*verbum cordis, verbum, amor*) pursue an understanding of the immanent life of God on the basis of an immanent human self-understanding. Hegel is in a line of thinkers but the difference is a final speculative sameness of human self-understanding and divine. Nor does one find discussion of anything like a *via analogia*, or *eminetiae*, or in my language, the way of hyperbole; and if there is a *via negativa* it is negativity as determinative, hence as leading to the positive that is stressed. Why none of the others? Because they imply a gap or difference, across which we move or God, but which remains even when crossed. This is representational thinking for Hegel.
- 3 On the theological-political issue, see Theunissen (1970), Shanks (1991), Lakeland (1984), Dickey (1987).
- 4 Among other places, Hegel speaks of a middle in *Glauben und Wissen* (GW, 4, 329, 338–9, 344). Is this a real middle, a real between? Fackenheim (1971) talks a lot about the Hegelian middle, but what kind of middle is this? There are different middles. On the difference of a Pascalian and Hegelian middle, see Desmond (1995c).
- 5 Note here Hegel’s repeated strategy in the philosophy of religion. The dominant strategy is not, so to say, to start at the bottom and work one’s way up to the heights. There is an elevation, yes, but it is not just the finite human struggling to overcome its own limits and attain a higher standpoint. There is this, of course, but this is placed within a more dominant holistic framework, where the absolute work is the work of the absolute itself. The ‘descending’ movement is that of the absolute (it)self, but this ‘descending’ is modelled on what we know from the ‘ascending’ form of self-transcendence that we humans discover in the struggle with our finiteness: self-transcendence as the initially indeterminate unity that must other itself to become itself; that must determine itself to be itself more truly; that must become self-determining in this process of mediation with itself, this self-mediation that finds itself again in the process of self-otherness. Then, moving down instead of up, it is the absolute One that others itself: we start with the absolute being which as such is indeterminate until it determines itself. The study of unity for Hegel is looking at the plurality of the forms of the determination of the absolute unity; a plurality conforming to the speculative dialectic that is the logical thread that holds the plurality into a true whole, which is an entirely self-mediated, self-determining unity. And this last is really ‘God’. Hegel’s discussion of the different

religions is of the determinations of God in time; determinations that do not do full justice to the whole truth of God, though all are partial absolute truths about the absolute that is beyond but includes all partiality. If we shift over from living subjectivity to speculative logic, both, in fact, are finally the same for Hegel. And then we see the structure that repeats itself again and again in Hegel's corpus, be it in logic, be it philosophy of religion, be it philosophy of art, be it philosophy of right: indeterminacy, determination, self-determination; or universality, particularity, individuality (concrete universality). If I repeat this point it is because Hegel repeats it, and I think, blurring the difference of our mediation with the ultimate, and the ultimate's mediation with us. The seeming two-ness of these two is not two; there is but one mediation and it is the absolute self-mediation of the absolute whole: the Whole of wholes, what Hegel believes the religious call God.

- 6 Traditionally a distinction has been made about the 'immanent' and 'economic' trinity: the first bearing on the inner life of the Godhead, the latter of the relation of God to creation and history. Cyril O'Regan (1994) is right to remind us that Hegel's trinity is both, hence 'inclusive'. Traditionally, Hegel has been criticized for not paying due attention to the difference of the 'immanent' and 'economic'. The inclusive view is often justified by the claim that God is, or will be 'all in all'. O'Regan is right about Hegel, but I want to stress that Hegel's 'all in all' follows a logic of erotic self-origination, erotic self-determination, not an agapeic sense of the 'above-all' of the full. O'Regan knows this well also. Hegel does overreach the difference of immanent and economic, in view of a complete holistic immanence. What follows from the agapeic God yields significantly different consequences for transcendence itself, for creation, and the difference of finitude, as well as for both divine self-communication and communication between creation and God.
- 7 See *LPR*, 261 on the difference of *Allesgötterei* and *Allgötterei*: everything is God, and the All is God.
- 8 On Hegel and Hinduism, see Viyagappa (1980); Westphal (1989).
- 9 See the list that he gives in *LPR* 429; he also mentions the Hindu Trimurti; on the triangle, see again Magee (2000).
- 10 See *Spirit of Christianity* in *ETW*, 265, *Nohl*, 312; also *ETW*, 261, *Nohl*, 309.
- 11 Others share with Hegel a drift towards erotic metaphors: Schelling, Marx, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Soloviev, Heidegger, the later Scheler, Whitehead. None are speculative dialecticians in the Hegelian mode, not even Schelling; some are confessing atheists; some are hostile to Hegelian dialectics. Yet the erotic metaphors is attractive because it does not freeze the ultimate power into static eternity but brings it into intimacy with becoming; beyond traditional dualisms, it helps us circumvent the Kantian interdiction on metaphysical transcendence in terms of immanent self-transcendence. See Desmond (2003).

Chapter 5

Creation and the Self-Doubling of Hegel's Trinity

Creation and Letting Be

Hegel's view of creation extends his trinitarian absolute and the logic it exhibits. Self-proclaimed atheist Karl Marx was especially irritated by Hegel's claim at the end of his *Logic* that the Idea lets itself go into nature. Such claims have incubated controversy on controversy, for instance, whether this 'release' is purely *immanent to thought* or not. It seems relatively easy for the Idea as the thought of thought to release itself to 'nature' as the *thought* of nature: the 'release' is all within thought. One wonders if every move 'outside' thought is only a quasi-move; for the 'outside' is again 'inside'. Not quite so easy, it seems, is it for the thought of nature to answer for the *ontological* bringing to be, in a prodigious and unique act of radical creation, the happening of finitude as such. But is this not what *creation* means? The issue of ontological otherness, be it of nature or of creation, disquiets both religious and anti-religious critics of Hegel.

There is today also a kind of commentary that trawls through the works of Hegel, and comes upon the few uses of words like '*lassen*', which is then made a key to his thought, and the plain sense of this is refashioned as more hospitable to robust otherness and irreducible plurality than can be read from the reiterated language of self-return that is all pervasive in Hegel. A few little fishes of '*lassen*' swim in the engulfing waters of self-return from self-othering, and these few 'free' fishes are fastened on to give us the feeling of free plurality, while all around us there swirls the silent engulfment of the holistic sea.

We are concerned with creation with respect to God, hence its witness to the ultimate origin and to ontological coming to be. With this too comes our worry about counterfeiting. Hegel seems to mimic fundamental moves we find in more traditional religious contexts. But in what sense is there genuine creation in Hegel? Or is creation seen so strongly in terms of God's 'self-creation' that finite creation as qualitatively, and affirmatively other to God disappears, or never properly appears for thinking? What kind of absolute would such a self-creating or self-becoming God be? What is the rationale and justification of such a God? Can Hegel do justice to creation as the origination of the finite other as genuinely other to God? Is there here a counterfeiting of creation as the most radical letting be of finitude as such?¹

Hegel speaks of creation relative to the second moment of the trinity. Second moment here refers less to the immanent self-creation of God (putting aside whether the language of creation is at all the right way to speak of the inner life of the Godhead), as to the movement from that immanent eternal life to the world

of finitude. The inclusive trinitarian monism governs this second movement also, and hence the *overreaching* character of Hegel's trinitarianism must be kept in mind.

The question of creation is also one of an ontological 'outside' to the Whole. Think of Parmenides' being as a full homogeneous Whole. There is no 'outside'. But is there then no 'coming to be'? There seems to be none. The question of creation and the ontological outside concerns how *finite* being comes to be – 'outside' the plenitude of eternity. In Hegel, like Parmenides, there seems no 'outside' the Whole. How then 'coming to be'? I think Hegel's answer is in terms of an *internal self-becoming*, and this finally too like Parmenides in terms of the finally homogeneous Whole. Hence the attraction of the erotic self-mediation of the whole. By contrast, and to anticipate, agapeic origination is not to be rendered in the language of the Eleatic homogeneous Whole. There may be a fullness, but as over-fullness, we are pointed to an origin, or God beyond the Whole. 'Coming to be' is not the immanent self-becoming of that God. It is the creation of the different whose finite otherness is given to be by the true heterogeneity of the God beyond the Whole. The sense of over-fullness betokens a sense of the ontological 'outside', as does the meaning of the 'not'. The finite full comes to be from the creation of the infinite over-full, and is both sustained as other and released as other, and thus is *not* homogeneous with the hyperbolic origin that gives to be. Hegel, the confessed Christian, if you like, remains too Eleatic, and not Jewish enough.

Creation and Jewish Transcendence

What are some of the things Hegel says about creation? There are some more general statements such as: 'God who is the truth, is known by us in his Truth, that is, absolute spirit, only in so far as we at the same time recognize that the world which He created, nature and the finite spirit, are in their difference from God, untrue' (*Enz*, § 83). With this one wonders if Hegel has both grasped and not at all grasped that creation has everything to do with difference, and the truth of difference – *not* the truth of difference as its untruth, but rather what makes finite creation *not* God.² Interestingly, in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, it is in his discussion of Judaism that we find most extensive reference to creation. In these discussions of Judaism as the religion of sublimity Hegel reveals a good bit about what he thinks about creation, with relevance to the God beyond the whole, and transcendence as other (T3). Obviously this is not his way of putting it, but his discomfort with transcendence and God beyond the whole is unmistakable.

The place of Judaism shifted in his different lecture series, now before Greek religion, now after as in the 1827 series. One thinks of a made-to-wander Jew, difficult to pin down finally even with speculative dialectic. Compared to Hegel's younger contempt, his respect did increase for a religion embodying a deeper insight into the principle of the One: the One God, a God of justice and ethical power, One both elevated above nature, as well as ingredient in the history of the Israelites. Yet unsurety persists: what to do with an otherness that should have had its time, but that still seems stubbornly to insist on itself despite Hegel's speculative holism? For us it is important to see how Hegel relates to the Jewish sense of divine

transcendence, how this transcendence is reconfigured in terms of creation as *divine self-determination*.

In Greek religion, Fate names the power *above* gods and men, but this excessive power received the name of God in Judaism, and Hegel is willing to admit here we have God for the first time. Judaism is a religion of sublimity. This sublimity is higher than beauty. Ethical powers are embraced within a spiritual unity. Such a spiritually subjective unity first merits the name of God (*LPR*, 357). For this unity, the natural is only something posited by it, something not independent but ideal. This unity does not reveal itself in the material. It shows absolute wisdom and power. Hegel also draws our attention to holiness here, as well as the ethical powers met with in the Greek religion of beauty. What does the holy mean for Hegel? The answer is slanted towards the *self-determining* God. But does not what *we* know of holiness transcend self-determination? Holiness is in the dimension of the hyperbolic. Hence its sublimity. But just this exceeds self-determination, and on the heights. Holiness is impossible without the blessing of the transcendent, but blessing exceeds self-determination. It first means being blessed, not blessing oneself.

For Hegel the Jewish God is absolute pure subjectivity: every externality is sublated in it; this God then is essentially thinking (*LPR*, 359). But then there is the divine particularization – this, for Hegel, is creation. Notice again how for Hegel this is connected to representation, though the true meaning of the ‘representation’ seems to be divine self-determination (*LPR*, 359). Consider what he says about God’s self-determining. This is

what is called God’s creating. God’s wisdom consists in being purposive, or determinative. But this wisdom is at first still abstract, being still the initial subjectivity, the initial wisdom, and there God’s judgment is not yet posited as internal to itself. Instead what is assumed is that God decrees, and what is posited or determined by God subsists at once in the form of an unmediated other. Were God’s wisdom concrete, then God would be his own self-determining in such a way that God himself would produce within himself what is created and sustain it internally, so that it would be known as sustained within him as his Son; God so defined would be known truly as concrete spirit. But since the wisdom is here abstract, the judgment or what is posited is thus something subsistent although only as a form: it is the subsisting world. [*LPR*, 359–60]

Hegel, remember, is not endorsing, more reporting Judaism, or rather his understanding of it, as a stage in transition. On his view, it seems, creation, understood as bringing into being the happening of finitude in its *otherness* to God, is only a representational abstraction that has failed to attain the true speculative standpoint of holistic immanence. And it is false if it fixates on the otherness at the expense of the holistic immanence. Jewish creation is only a representational abstract of what is more concretely true and immanent in the Christian trinity. And if we look carefully at the pages that follow this, we will see that Hegel goes on to try and squeeze the doctrine of creation into the form of a more absolute self-determination.

There are places where Hegel’s discussion seems to take up creation from nothing. This is put thus: God creates from *his own* nothing. The world posited by spirit is made out of *its* nothing. In the 1831 lectures he says: ‘Spirit is what is utterly self-mediating inwardly, or what is active. This activity is a distinguishing from self, a judging (or primal division). The world is what is posited by spirit; the world is made

out of its nothing. But the negative of the world is the affirmative, the Creator, in whom the nothing is what is natural. Within its nothing, therefore, the world has arisen out of the absolute fullness of the power of the good. It has been created from its own 'nothing' which (its other) is God (*LPR*, 359, n. 450). What is the nothing here? This is not at all clear. As far as I can see, Hegel has no way of thinking this 'nothing' outside of his doctrine of *self-relating negativity*: the negative activity that in determination makes self-determination possible. But self-relating negativity (Hegel's definition of thinking subjectivity also) is *not* the nothing of the creation *ex nihilo*. This *nihil* is a more radical nothing, since self-relating negativity, such as we know it in the determining process of thinking, *already* presupposes a *coming to be*, a *not-being-nothing*. This 'not-being-nothing' is not simply the determination of a negation related to itself. In creation *ex nihilo*, the 'yes' that gives coming to be is not the result of a double negation. This creating 'yes' is prior to and asymmetrical to any 'no', any nothing. The divine 'yes' by which the world comes to be is qualitatively other to the 'yes' and 'no' we find in a process of determining self-becoming. Hegel, I suspect, does not understand the difference between coming to be and becoming; and hence does not understand the meaning of the 'to be': being and the 'is' as communicated from a radical surplus of originaive power, properly beyond every whole. This points to the God beyond the whole.³

Hegel suggests that there is *no going forth with this God* (*LPR*, 360–1, his word, *hervorgehen*). It is clear what he is trying to effect: no going forth is with the view to turning creation into God's self-creation such that there is no subsisting other (there is 'going forth' in Hinduism). Creation and the Son are the same and included in God's holistic immanence. And hence the God of absolutely immanent self-determination is prepared for, even in the Jewish God of radical transcendence, hence also preparing for Hegel's version of trinitarian Christianity. Is this faking Judaism, as well as Christianity: making it fit? But fit what? And fitting for what?

Hegel's creation is tied up with self-relation: 'Here the fundamental definition of God is: subjectivity that relates itself to itself' (361); 'God's creation is an eternal creation; but God is the initiator of creation, not the result. If the divine subjectivity were determined as result, as self-creating, then it would be grasped as concrete spirit' (361). Clearly this is not so in Judaism, and hence the *abstraction* of this creator, hence deficiency, only remedied in his version of Christianity. In Judaism, God is only a first and not a result (362). Notice again the stress on self-relation: God's relations to the world are God's own attributes, since the world is God's own particularization. These relations are 'God's very own determinateness, and hence God's own attributes'. If the importance of *relation* is stressed, much depends on the form of relation, and the difference of different relations. This is very evident when he says (*LPR*, 360, n. 457) 'Power is also negative relation to self, inner mediation, and since it refers negatively to itself, this sublation of abstract identity is the positing of difference, of determination, i.e., it is the creation of the world. But the nothing from which the world is created is the absence of all difference. ... The creation of the world, therefore, means the negative reference of power to itself.' *Contra* Hegel, all relations do not dialectically serve a fuller speculative self-relation, however you describe it.

Hegel speaks of the fact that the world is as God's goodness, justice (363). And does he not grant relevant otherness when he speaks of 'the fact that God releases

himself from himself, and sets his content ... free even from his absolute unity'? What kind of release is this? The mention of goodness might make one think of it as bordering on agapeic release, but it is not: 'Only what is free can have its determinations over against it as free, or can let them go as free.' 'Letting go' – but this release is just *self-release into one's own* otherness, as seeming over against one, but there is no final otherness here. For it is not release of the finite other into its own irreducible being for itself. Hegel does not see the *nihil* as connected with the asymmetrical difference between the absolute source and the finite creation that has been given to be in an agapeic release of its other-being as other, and good as other. What seems to be a letting go as free, for Hegel, turns into a justice in which the finite as other has really no genuine independence. And so it falls back into the embrace of the infinite subjectivity; the differences turn out to be 'moments of one subject'.

Judaism did produce a de-divinized world where we encounter things and the prose of nature. Yet, in shades of Spinoza, Hegel affirms the identity of the divine and the natural: 'In fact it [the divine] is everywhere' (364). But too often this identity is merely abstract and cheaply obtained. Authentic identity is only found within *infinite subjectivity*, that determines itself, that lets its determinations go free as world, but these finally are void of true independence. Notice that Hegel says here the idea of *miracle* emerges for the first time. But what is the meaning of miracle for Hegel? 'The true miracle is the appearance of spirit in nature, and the authentic appearance of spirit is, in its fundamental aspect, the *spirit of humanity*, and the human consciousness of the world' (365 [emphasis added]). In Judaism, miracle is really 'a contingent manifestation of God':

[T]he genuine manifestation of God in the world, however, is the absolute or determinate manifestation, and the mode or manner of this manifestation, its forms, appears as what we call 'sublimity,' and for that reason we call this religion the religion of sublimity...Sublimity emerges as the appearance or relation of this infinite subject to the world. The world is grasped as the manifestation of this subject, but as a manifestation that is not affirmative ...

Sublimity, he says, annihilates the adequacy of the material in which the sublime appears (366). Perhaps, but different interpretations of this are possible. The inadequacy may not be a limitation to be *Aufgehoben*, but a negative communication of transcendence as other.⁴ If Hegel sometimes seems to name God's otherness in discussing sublimity, he will invariably go on to immanentize this sublimity, and weaken its power as the communication of the qualitative difference of creation and divine transcendence as other. The sublime for Kant involves our subreption in attributing to the object what is properly attributable to us. One is led to think here that for Hegel 'creation' is but *God's subreption*, not ours.

It is remarkable how some things he says harken back to earlier discussion in his youthful works regarding the Law (*LPR*, 367). Thus true purpose does not fall in nature, but in consciousness, but with the Jews the divine is connected with legality and right (*LPR*, 368). Necessity here is not blind, as in Greek religion: it is concrete, and so connected with right and with law (*LPR*, 368–9). And yet the old refrain of deficiency is sung: we find the limited purpose of God, and the limited realization of

God within consciousness (Hegel adverts to a concern with prosperity):⁵ 'The wisdom and self-determining of God does not yet include God's development. This development in the ideal of God is first found in the religion where the nature of God is open and manifest ... in this religion ... he is not what is eternally self-developing within itself ... abstract universality' (371). The limitation of the Jewish God also is that it is only a national God (*LPR*, 372). God is a lawgiver: the laws as given, not self-determined (*LPR*, 374). And abstract purpose follows from the fact that the commandments are only given. There is an interesting comparison of Moses and Solon and Lycurgus (in the variant from 1831, [372–3]). These latter were human and human alone, but Moses *received* the law, did not determine it through self. The 'positive' nature of the commands is also connected with a 'fanaticism of stubbornness', and a religion of service of the Lord, stressing preservation as the purpose of life, and ownership of the land. This, it seems, is finally servile. Hegel cannot conceive of a service beyond self-determination. Like Nietzsche, outside self-determination he tends to see only servility.⁶ In the cultus he finds the same element of 'positivity' as in the commands, the abstract wisdom, the concern for the territory, and so on. The Jews, he thinks, do not even have property in a proper legal sense (*LPR*, 375), as he says we see with the Jubilee year when the land reverts to its original owners. One might say that in Hegel's account there is no feel for *being as sabbatical*. I mean the day of original affirmation of finite creation in the 'It is very good' in the beginning, and the Jubilee return of being as divine gift, not human property.

Representation, Concept, Hyperbole

Let us look at some more systematic aspects of the question. In the reflections to follow I will be offering some difficult thoughts, both with respect to Hegel and the matter itself. If the reader finds them too rare, we will come down to earth in the next chapter with evil. Some may find it easier to skip straight to evil, but how we think of creation, despite the extraordinary hardness of it, is crucial.

When Hegel explicitly calls 'creation' a religious *Vorstellung* (*LPR*, 148–9), it is important to recall the significance of this.⁷ It means that while for Hegel something of ultimacy is here being shown, the form in which it is being shown is not in fact adequate to the content, and hence by the logic of its own inner instability, it must be rationally superseded. Rational supersession will be effected by Hegel's concept. As we saw, a *Vorstellung* for Hegel is always deficient because the form is not true to the absolute immanence of the content; it keeps tempting us with a reference to something beyond the representation itself, either beyond as before us, or beyond as over and above what has been captured in the representation itself. These are defects for Hegel, not perhaps for religious consciousness itself, but for philosophy. What is fine for the religious consciousness purely on its own terms, is not satisfying for the philosophical consciousness which demands the unity of form and matter, which Hegel believes can only be attained in the self-determination of the *Begriff* where form and content are one: the content forms itself in the form, which as its self-formation, is nothing but the self-determination of the content. Creation is a representation that contains this truth of absolute self-determination but not in a form which is fully true to the self-creating content.

Hegel is lethally self-consistent, but why do we fear something not quite right in his account? The question of form and content can be seen otherwise. Consider. Suppose there are 'representations' that are not defective in form, but rather our truest forms to give expression to the divine. Suppose creation is not an indefinite content that must be made more self-determining. Suppose it is what one might call a hyperbolic thought. Suppose creation were more like a *metaphysical hyperbole*, the thought of something hyperbolic, and in excess of finite, univocal determination, or our self-determination. If so, creation cannot be a mere 'representation' in Hegel's sense to be *aufgehoben* in the *Begriff*, wherein conceptual thought is said to be at home with *itself*. Such a hyperbolic thought would rather point to something *other* to thought – which yet asks to be thought. If indeed creation is a 'representation', as hyperbolic, it is such as to point to what necessarily exceeds all 'representation' – and all conceptual thought at home with itself.⁸

One can connect this with the fact that creation is not the *determinative making* such as we find in the demiurgic imposition of form on matter.⁹ Nor can it be aligned with any sort of *techné* (*contra* Heidegger). It is disproportionate to any finite making. What makes it thus disproportionate? Its radical origination of the new; its giving to be of the 'never before' into its unique 'once'. But if creation has to do with the coming to be of the determinate, it cannot be grasped in determinate representations or concepts. This means that creator as origin is not a *first being* whence other beings become: the ultimate source of coming to be cannot be a being in that derived determinate sense. Hence it cannot be assimilated to the terms of any so-called 'onto-theology' such as Heidegger wants to overcome or 'metaphysics of presence' such as post-Heideggerians decry. Neither the projects of *Aufhebung*, or overcoming or deconstruction can be appropriate to creation understood in the hyperbolic sense. Far from being captive to an idol, creation shatters all idols. It is, so to say, a 'representation' of hyperbolic transcendence that shatters 'representation', in so far as the latter is liable to be a dissimulating figure of transcendence in immanence.

With this hyperbolic thought we are in a somewhat reverse situation to Hegel's absolute knowing which has reached the point where it no longer needs to go beyond itself. Why? The idea of exceeding, or going further in thought, or surpassing a hyperbolic thought, simply makes no sense. In one respect, there is nowhere further to go. But the point is not loss of thinking, but a different thinking that dwells in the hyperbole(s) of being; and not with the pretension of converting it (these) into a self-determining concept. This conversion is a perversion of what is asked of thought by this hyperbole. I doubt that Hegel was attuned to what is here at stake. Does he even see that the hyperboles can offer the ways that help us give expression to what exceeds us; that the 'representation', just in its imagistic reference to unmastered transcendence, witnesses to the very truth itself. Iconic speech is needed which incarnates in itself just this confession of its own finitude, and its witness to what exceeds finiteness. Its doubleness is just its being on the boundary *between finitude and infinity*. Nor is this infinity the dialectical other of finitude but the hyperbolically superior transcendence which can never be defined simply by a process of finite self-surpassing. The asymmetrical difference is kept open. But this is no defect. Hegel can only see the doubleness as a dualism, or a potential dualism. He does not see the doubleness as a redoubling of finitude that witnesses to its

hyperbolic other. Where he does see a process of the redoubling of finitude, as its own self-surpassing, he does not see that the doubling is not just a self-redoubling of finitude, but a doubleness *between* finitude (no matter how unlimitedly self-redoubling) and an excessive infinity, that is both always ever present, and always ever more, or over and above.

Demiurgy, Self-Creation, Creation *ex nihilo*

How then think of creation? Obviously myths of ultimate origins bear on creation, but it is most especially with monotheistic religions that a radical concept of creation appears. If there is one God, all derives from that **One**, Lord of creation, Maker of heaven and earth. Is *creation ex nihilo* to be found in *Genesis*? Some scholars deny it is (see May, 1995), but this is not our consideration here. Creation has to do with *the coming to be* of finite being. How think, how can we think, the ultimate origin of coming to be? We cannot think it absolutely: as creations of the origin, we ourselves are derivative, hence not on a par with the origin. This is a consideration Hegel does not take seriously enough. All our talk about the ultimate origin and its creating must be from the standpoint of our being in creation as already effected, that is, from the standpoint of the finite between. The origin as giving rise to the finite between is not the finite between, it is other; and while there may be a relation or relations specified by the term 'creation', we as derived beings cannot be identified with the origin, otherwise we ourselves would be either underived and absolutely original, or else self-derived, or perhaps an expression of the ultimate's own self-derivation. In so far as Hegel does not sufficiently respect the being of asymmetrical difference that follows from the very essence of being created, he moves ambiguously in these directions, and especially the last possibility.

Of course, a distinction is often made between demiurgic making and creation in a more radical sense. The former we find in the great myth of the *Timaeus*: the demiurge imposes form on chaos, looking to the eternal paradigms, and yet makes a cosmos, that is, a whole of well-ordered beauty, and making it thus, not simply to show its technical virtuosity as a cosmic geometer, but to make the best and most beautiful cosmos. For this divine artist both the aesthetic beauty and the ontological good of finite being is at stake. Hegel would reject the otherness here implied between the maker and the matter, since the matter, for him, would be the self-making of the maker: creation, for him, is not external determination, but immanent self-determination in self-externalization.

The story of creation in *Genesis* may have some echoes of this demiurgic making in that the spirit of God moved on the waters and formed them from chaos into a world. But creation *ex nihilo* is neither demiurgic making, nor Hegelian self-determination in self-externalization. It is important that the creator here saw that it was good, it was very good. The point is not just a matter of making, but a matter of the good of the finite 'to be'. In Hegel's references to creation, there is no satisfactory understanding of this aspect: the good of the 'to be', as derivative from a source itself absolutely good. It is not that Hegel is blind to the idea of God as good and just; but the sense of ontological good here at issue is not in his way of thinking. In fact, we will see something quite different later when discussing evil: for Hegel the

determination of finite particularity, that is, creation, has a necessarily evil side to it.

The contrast of demiurgic making and creation comes out in that the latter is not an imposition of form and matter (each already given in some manner), but the giving to be of being at all, and hence the giving to be of form and matter themselves, hence *other* even to the unity of form and matter. This would be a radical origination that is presupposed by all finite being but which itself is presupposed by nothing, and conditional on nothing but itself, and in that sense unconditional. We see why this would arise within a consistent monotheistic context. If there is one God, this God will be determined by nothing but itself, and hence be conditional on nothing at all; and all other being, if there is such, will be conditional on it, for its being at all. Creation as the act by which this God brings being to be points in this direction of unconditional origination, bound by nothing but itself.

The contrast between demiurgic making and creation makes us ask about what is proper to the mode of ontological 'determination' we find in creation. I note these two options. First option: creation is a mode of self-determination: bound by nothing but itself, the origin determines itself; it is absolute self-determination, and in that regard, its absolute freedom is also its absolute necessity, for it can be nothing but itself, in being absolutely free in itself. This first option has clear relevance to Hegel.

Second option: creation is not self-determination, but the giving to be of what is not the origin in itself: creation is the origination of the happening of being as the finite between; the happening of finitude is, but it might not be, were it not that it were given to be by the absolute original. Why invoke this second option at all? If we do not, then we would have to blink away the very happening of finitude. If everything were just *univocally* the self-determination of God, there would be nothing other to God, and hence we would not even have the experience we seem to have, namely, of being other to God in the finite between. I suppose this would be something like Spinozist acosmism.

Hegel is drawn to the self-determination of the divine, but he is honest enough to grant that we cannot blink away the givenness of finitude. But then how grant that finitude and yet retain the self-determination of God? Hegel's answer is to enlarge dialectically the meaning of creation as self-determination, such that it includes the finite other, but the finite other not as absolutely other, but as a moment in the very immanent life of the absolute itself. That is, creation is a determination of the self-determination of the divine, but its self-determination as other, but not so other that the circle of absolute self-determination is compromised. The overreaching trinity comes into play in this more inclusive circle of absolute self-determination. We have to ask ourselves here again: is a certain pre-understanding of otherness shaping this figuring of creation as self-determination? While overtly Hegel seems to be able to acknowledge our place in finitude, immediately he places that in relation to a holistic speculative dialectic in which the otherness of finitude and any transcendence of the divine are necessarily qualified as not ultimate. And then finally what creation becomes really is the self-creation of God.

The second option means something different, and in my view is truer to finitude and the transcendence of God. *Creatio ex nihilo* names a different sense of origination than self-origination. Likewise, this *nihil* is other than the determinate negation that

allows Hegel to deconstruct all differences and sublate them all as moments of an absolutely inclusive whole. This is origination that is not self-origination: not *creatio ex deo*, such that the creation is God again: such an *ex deo* is not really a radical exiting into otherness. 'Exiting into otherness' – this also is not the right way to speak of the radical giving to be of the happening of finitude, for this, as creating, is a radical giving of finitude's *coming to be*. (*Becoming in* finitude might be a kind of qualified self-determining, but the *coming to be of* finitude is not self-determining at all.) And the *ex nihilo* is no denial that it is God who is creating; but the originating is by God from nothing, in that the finite being is brought to be, and it would be nothing at all were it not brought to be. *The nothing is constitutive of its finite being, not by constituting it, but by qualifying the mode of its ontological constitution, such that, by its very being, it is not God and cannot be God.* The 'not' is not only between it and God, but is in it as its nothingness without the most radically intimate ontological origination that always now sustains it in being.

'Being given to be' here is gift: not self-determination. This 'being given to be' is a *passio essendi* before it is a *conatus essendi*. And this is not necessary, either with reference to its originating source, or in itself: it is but it might not be. To be as this gift – this is contingency as created good. It is the good of the ultimate 'to be' that is at the source of this givenness as gift. This is the ontological sweetness of being at all: very good. God saw that it was very good, but this seeing means difference in order to be seen. God is not seeing himself in seeing creation: he is seeing it, and in the seeing which is difference, seeing it as good. Paradoxically, the nothingness that is constitutive is inseparable from this 'it is good', also constitutive of the finite being as created. Everything here said about creation demands a very different approach to the Hegelian one.

Creation, Coming to be, Being

We can connect Hegel's understanding of *being* with the question of creation. Hegel describes his *Logic* as 'the exposition of God (*die Darstellung Gottes*) as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind' (GW 11, 21; SL, 50). How are we to take what he says? Are we to think of his *Logic* not only as 'mimicking' the so-called self-creation of 'God', but as itself enacting it? Is there a transposition of the idea of *causa sui* away from the register of any causality that falls back into external determination, with cause and effect being different and separable? Rather here self-cause, as self-creation, makes the origin and its issue the same, the source and the derivative. And then there is no derivative, in another sense, since it is the source serving itself, you might say. Result: everything is (eternally) 'created', nothing is created; everything is absolute, nothing is absolute. It proves impossible to erect a difference between the two, as it does between the creator and the creation. Everything is the other of everything else, and hence there is nothing that is other to anything else. And this holds true of God and creation.

When he metaphorically/representationally describes his *Logic* thus, we could say that the logic for Hegel, as *Begriff* rather than *Vorstellung*, is more truly creation in the sense of being the self-creating round of divine minding at home with itself, minding itself and nothing but itself. Would this be then the more primal

'creation' as the self-creation of 'God' in which every otherness is immediately, eternally cancelled? But can one call *this* creation? If creation implies a coming to be? But if God is, God does not come to be. How could *that which is eternally* come to be, except that it were possible for it not to be? If it were possible for God not to be, God would not be necessary, and in a certain sense more impossible than possible. Hegel's canvassing of the ontological argument, even granted in his version, tells against this view.¹⁰ Coming to be with reference to what is possible refers to the happening of contingency, and this more properly bears on the notion of creation. Something important here is the temporal *newness* coming to be. But with self-creation where is the newness, in that regard, that comes to be? Creation is inseparable from the coming to be of time, ontological newness, and the arising of contingent happening. What we call becoming, self-becoming, hence also self-determination are possibilized within, and only granting, this more primal coming to be. 'Creation' is a metaphysical metaphor or hyperbolic thought concerning this primal coming to be.

In some places, Hegel implies the self-creation of God, irrespective of temporal coming to be, hence in terms of an eternal self-creation. Here, consistent with his version of inclusive, overreaching trinitarianism, he will try to fold the coming to be of time back into *one creation, one divine self-creation*, and the difference of an eternal self-creating energy and the coming to be of finite creation will be blurred, if not done away with. If we consider being in Hegel's *Logic*, we see that the emphasis does not fall on the hyperbolic happening of being, the 'that it is at all'. His interest is in being as a *thought determination*, and within the immanence of thought generating its own determinations. Being is the first thought determination generated when thought thinks on itself: Thought *is*.¹¹ But clearly this is not at all creation, in the sense intended by invoking the coming to be of the finite happening. I would rather say that the hyperbole of creation begins to emerge when we are astonished by the too muchness, the overdeterminacy of given being and we wonder about an even more excessive source that gives this to be. In Hegel, just as we find nothing of this metaphysical astonishment before the happening of being, correspondingly, we find being attenuated into the emptiest thought determination.

As I have argued elsewhere, Hegel can be counted among thinkers who inherit a certain devaluation of being in modernity, and hence also as one lacking finesse for the intimate strangeness of being, and what it equivocally communicates of the God beyond holistic immanence.¹² His reconfiguring, his counterfeiting, of transcendence as other (T3) can be felt in his depreciation of the sublime, for instance, as a 'beyond' that stands against the final turn, return to self of immanence for itself. Hegel the youth was filled with a dry contempt for the emptiness of the Alpine scene. Hegel the older man was struck more by the Jewish transcendent spirit, but this seems so coupled with an endorsement of nature almost as a godless nothing, that we find little in him of rapport with the glory of creation, or any sense of the sacramental earth. These are signs betraying his coldness to the glory of creation which would solicit, draw forth from one a quite different attunement to the happening of being. He did feel the pull of something like this in the pantheistic register, something we might consider as compensating for the empty world of valueless mechanism.¹³ There is too much of the devalued being of modernity, and not enough of the sacramental earth, and perhaps also not enough (at least in the

later Hegel) of the pagan dream of Greece and its aesthetic rapport with creation as full (see Chapter 1). The glory of transcendence as hyperbolic of which the psalms sing is not accorded by him the rightness of its celebrating voice.¹⁴ The turn away from transcendence as other reasserts itself, and our self-transcending that yearns upwards to the God beyond the whole is aborted. Self-transcendence is turned back into the circle of immanence, and as it circles around itself, it feels the intoxication of the whole in itself. And even if it feels itself beyond the spiritlessness of mechanism, being beyond that spiritlessness is not being beyond enough, if we are deaf to the glory of creation that sings of the God beyond the whole.

A God Giving Birth to Itself: The Erotics of Creation

The metaphysical metaphor of the erotic origin lends itself to a kind of self-creation through self-othering; the agapeic origin points to the creation of an other that is not a self-othering but the release of that created other into the gift of its own otherness. Hegel's God, I have suggested, conforms to the first, and lacks the resources to acknowledge, much less think the second. The erotic origin mediates itself from lack to fulfilment; the agapeic origin communicates from fullness to fullness. Remember also the 'erotic trinity': the first is an indeterminacy lacking determination; the second is the first in its own otherness, and so gives the lacking original first its proper determination; the third is the self-knowing in which the determination of the second is recognized as the self-determination of the first; and so the lack of the original first attains self-completion through the otherness of the second in the fulfilled self-determination of the third.

Does not Hegel's God, as it were, give birth to itself? '[W]hat God creates God himself is' (*LPR*, 129). I find here a kind of speculative anticipation of Nietzsche's world as a work of art giving birth to itself. How intelligible is a self-creating God, a God that gives birth to itself? Consider. If the origin is originally lacking being, and must produce its other (itself as other), to be itself, *in what sense is it itself at all in the first place?* What kind of absolute could that be? And if it is not itself (as a mere indeterminacy) in the first place, how then can it be an origin of what is other to itself, much less itself? Put concisely: *A God that has to create itself to be itself must first be itself in order to create itself.* And this apart altogether from the creation of what is other to itself. But how must this God *already be itself*, in order for it to further create itself, give birth to itself, and what is other to itself? Why must it create *itself*, if it is always already itself? Even granting that this is a possibility, must there not be a 'being always already itself' before this determining of itself or being other to itself? Does speculative dialectic go deep enough into this always already effective energy of being, that must be presupposed for something like so-called 'divine self-determination', or for finite coming to be, or for a dialectical self-becoming, to be effected at all in the first place? Do we have to resort to the metaphysical metaphor of the agapeic origin to be true to this surplus of the absolute 'always already being itself'? Is there a God *more than any speculative whole*, other than any holistic network of determinations said to be self-determining?¹⁵ And can the finite world of plurality as the other of this God be equated with Hegel's speculative One as dialectically self-othered?

Hegel's claim that 'the true is the whole' is consistent with a dialectical erotics of holistic immanence. (Nietzsche gives us a Dionysian erotics of holistic immanence.) Inevitably the superlative transcendence of the divine One beyond the whole disappears in this way of thinking. The community of this God and creation is such that otherness will seem a mark of estrangement. The interplay of transcendence and immanence will be reduced from a re-doubling or plurivocal intermediation to a self-doubling or singular self-mediation. There will be no interplay between irreducible others, only the self-interplay of the absolute with itself, love disporting with *itself*, as Hegel puts it.

True, Hegel says that self-disporting love degenerates into 'insipidity', if it does not endure the negative and give itself over to otherness. But this 'negative' is its own, is itself again. And this endurance and giving over are finally with the view to a fuller love still disporting with itself: a love that has proved itself, through negativity and otherness, that has become reconciled to itself through itself in its own otherness. This is not agapeic love, and the superplus good that it communicates to the finite other, and not just self-communicates. Finally, it is the erotic love which loves itself in its loving of the other, and in which its overreaching inclusion of the other is its mediated return to self-love. If it has proved its love through negativity and otherness, the love so proved is its love for itself. But there is a different love wherein a movement of transcendence takes place, which is not for the self that loves but for the other that is being loved. With creation, the other being loved is the other than is given being, in the act of being loved.

Let us look again at the kind of *relation* between a creating origin (O) and the creation (C) it brings to be. Since this is a bringing to be, we are dealing with a dynamic happening; the relation is a relating, a dynamic interplay. But in this instance, it is not *first* an interplay, since the term C has to be given to be, or come to be, before there can be any interplay of O and C. Being given to be is presupposed by that interplay. When Hegel thinks of relations as interplays, he already presupposes, and forgets, the primal coming to be. That is to say, he does not think creation as such. An interplay presupposes the 'inter', both as given and as giving. Its being given is an open possibilizing of relating, while its giving enables the realization of the promise of different, more or less determinate, relations within the 'inter'. Presupposing this 'inter', *some* forms of the play can be understood as a mutual determination by the terms in interplay. But it is not at all correct to say that such a mutual determination properly defines the very coming to be of the interplay.

Not seeing this, we are tempted to say: there is no God (O) without creation (C), for what we always have is their interplay. And then we get Hegel: God is not God without the world. This, I agree, is partially true for us from the standpoint of the interplay, that is, from the standpoint of accepting *as granted* the inter or the between: when we think out of the between, for us there is no world without God, and in another sense, no God without world, for we live in the happening of world, and what we think of God cannot be absolutely abstracted from that happening. But this is not the end of the matter, since the question of creation concerns just the happening as a *being given*, the 'that it is at all' of finitude. This also concerns the very happening of the interplay as being at all, *not* the nature of the interplay, taken as given or already granted. Hegel remains captive to the latter 'taken for grantedness', and indeed develops a logic that bars him from thinking beyond that

'taken for grantedness'. Indeed that very logic prevents him from understanding the ontological signs communicated in the between that suggest what exceeds the interplay, in the interplay itself. Thus he has no eyes for the hyperboles of being which point beyond themselves and the between as the created interplay of beings.

One of these signs has to do with being itself, being at all. 'That it is': here we have what I call the idiot hyperbole: happening *qua* happening, and in the absolute singularity of creation that cannot be subsumed under any universal category of our thought. Hence its character as a hyperbolic thought. And this 'that it is' is interpreted by Hegel in an entirely indigent sense: it is a mere indefiniteness, that to be anything truly real, must be more determined. Being then is a pure empty indeterminacy, indistinguishable from nothing, and *voilà*, in Hegel's thinking, both being and nothing as thought determinations show themselves to be superseded by becoming. Becoming: but this is the interplay taken for granted as already a given happening: it has already happened (as he suggests in the *Logic*). But this is not 'coming to be' as the origination of the 'that it is at all'. And *this* is what is at stake in the notion of creation. Hegel is oblivious to coming to be in that creative sense. He folds all being into this process of determinate becoming, and more so, even into a process that turns out to be one of self-becoming or *self-determination*.

This is how one can understand Hegel's reconfiguration of what I called above the interplay. Within the Hegelian interplay, **O** determines **C** and **C** determines **O**; hence they are mutually determining. Moreover, by mutual determination, they become beyond the empty indefiniteness of mere being. More, both are necessary to each other in this process of mutual determination: each is the other of the other, and hence necessary to the self-definition, or self-determination of the other. That is to say, each is necessary to the other as part of a more inclusive process which allows self-determination, a process which indeed is determining itself in the interplay of its participants. How easy to move then to a view of the whole as an inclusive process of self-determination. The interplay closes in on itself in absolute self-becoming, beyond which there is nothing.

This is the kind of logic Hegel applies to God. 'God' is this inclusive process, or 'God' is in interplay with 'creation', and 'together' they participate in this more inclusive process of absolute self-becoming or self-determination, within which all otherness is embraced, and hence all transcendence, and indeed one must add, evil. But this is a 'whole' constructed on the oblivion of the difference of coming to be and becoming. It is constructed on loss of mindfulness of the astonishing gift of the 'that it is at all', and loss of creation as reminding us of the 'that it is at all' as a hyperbolic sign communicating the origin in and through the happening of finitude.

The collapse of the difference of origin and creation follows from Hegel's erotic God. But this is to erase creation, and by implication make unintelligible any thought of origin. I repeat: an absolute that has to become itself to be itself cannot be an absolute to begin with, and hence cannot begin, or create, the new beginning we find as the finite between. There must be more to the origin than erotic self-origination as above understood, if there is to be any beginning such as we might call 'creation'. An absolute that has to become itself to be itself, cannot first *be* an absolute, much less an absolute that could become at all. Strangely enough, instead of the absolute dynamism and relating we seem to be promised above by Hegel, we find it difficult to avoid absolute stasis, or an absorbing god in which all differences

are dissolved, and hence in which there is none of the internal differentiation Hegel wants, and even more, nothing of the coming to be of the new and the different in finitude, such as is promised by the idea of creation.

Erotic origination, on its own terms, is unintelligible if we do not presuppose some surplus power that cannot be rendered in the language of empty indeterminacy, either in the beginning or in the end. Agapeic origination is a way of speaking of this: 'bringing to be' from surplus good rather than from initial lack. The initial lacking indeterminacy could never even get from the spot did it not presuppose the being at work of something more, another surplus power, that cannot be said necessarily to produce an other in order for it to be full, to be itself; for it is already surplus, overfull, hyperbolically beyond the language of indeterminacy, determination, self-determination. As used by Hegel, the terms have some appropriate uses within the interplay, though even there, they are not enough. They are not appropriate alone to the happening of the interplay as happening: the 'that it is'. Here we require the language of the overdeterminate which can never be reduced to a dialectical interplay of indeterminacy, determination, self-determination. It always exceeds them; indeed they would not be at all, did we not presuppose this other hyperbolic surplus power.

If here we have to resort to a metaphor, indeed hyperbole of a form of love, this is not a simple defect Hegel can turn to advantage by claiming to have *concepts*, while we are trapped in 'representations'. His concept is a rationalized form of erotic self-determination that dissimulates its roots in love. The pity is that his thought was not *more deeply rooted* in an appreciation of agapeic love as a giving from surplus generosity, and giving for the sake of the other as other. The results for thought would be entirely different. Recall what I said in a previous chapter: the lack of discrimination in Hegel between different forms of love, evident in his early writings, is never really rectified. This comes home to roost here, because we are dealing with the need for the utmost in nuance when we consider fundamental relations, or forms of relativity.

I do not say erotic self-transcendence itself, as showing the affirmative energy of ecstatic being, can be described fully in the language of lack or empty indeterminacy. For it is not lack that transcends, it is the affirmative power of being as more than can be reduced to determination: this power exceeds determinacy, not because it lacks determinacy, but because what it is is more than determinacy; hence the language of overdeterminacy. An image of this doubleness of eros is given in the *Symposium*: eros is born of penia and poros, and there is divine festivity at the conception of eros; sleeping divine intoxication is always a parent, a source, a promise, even when eros in its poverty must seek an other to fulfil it. If penia, poverty, is itself twined with poros, one might venture that penia is twinned with *porosity*, and hence in eros there is a primal poverty that marks it as a place of passage *between (metaxu)* mortals and divinities. As this between or porosity, this poverty of eros is paradoxically rich beyond this or that determinacy of being, and beyond self-determination also, for there is a *passio essendi* that exceeds, while making possible, all self-determination. Eros thus seen reminds us that (self)-becoming participates in a more primal coming to be. Hence the fructifying power of the joining of penia and poros in the porosity of the *passio essendi*. Plato does not say this, I know. Nevertheless, this double image of eros in Plato is full of more

fertile equivocality than the speculative concept of Hegel that is finally too monistic, paradoxically too one-dimensional, in its all-inclusiveness.

Let me briefly suggest some of those nuances of fundamental relations better thought in agapeic terms. I focus especially on the different view of otherness and creation. Agapeic transcending would be an exceeding that goes beyond itself but goes not to seek itself in the other but to give to the other, to make a way for the other, to offer something good to the other, and to offer it, not expecting or demanding a return to itself. It gives a good away, and in giving away, it gives a way. It opens up something as being for itself, and not for its return to the giving source. There is no dialectically necessitated circuit that must be traversed in which the giving origin externalized itself, recognizes itself in the other, and hence returns to itself. This giving away that gives a way; that makes way for the other as for itself as other; that opens up a space beyond itself for the other, but which is also a space between the origin and the other; this is where creation comes more truly into its own. And this way opening, or given for the finite other, as a between, is the promise of communication between the origin and the creation. If there is a twofoldness, it is not necessarily a dualism. And though the space between also gives the promise of freedom, it allows the betrayal of communication, and hence the refusal of the good of the giving origin. (We come back to evil in the next chapter.)

The agapeic origin does not produce itself in giving creation. It is always already itself – superplus power of origination, overdeterminate, not in ‘need’ of finite determination. Finitude is not its own determination, but is a released happening that is given its own promise of being creative. This God gives the being of creation. This first creative relation is one of bringing to be. It is absolute in that what is brought to be is absolved into its own being for itself; and the being-for-self of the origin, is as it is, superplus excess, absolute generosity of overdeterminate good. Finite being is given to be in creation: it is a creation; it is created by an absolute origination, itself bound by nothing. The nothing again names the qualitative difference of origin and creation, since this absolute absolving act is not creating itself in creating creation. The nothing names the hyperbolic asymmetry of the God who creates, since not only is creation absolutely singular, but the source of this absolute singular happening is absolutely singular in an even more hyperbolic sense. The first absolute relating for finitude (agapeically being given its finite being for itself) then has something *doubly, hyperbolically asymmetrical about it*. And if God gives creation to be, only on the basis of this first hyperbolically asymmetrical origination, can there be further determinate relations of God and creation.

Even if these determinate relations can be defined in terms of an interplay, there is much enigma at play here. Some, like Aquinas, who stress the one-way relation of creation seem to downplay interplay, since it might seem to compromise the absoluteness of the divine origin. This need not be, I think, if the origin is agapeic. For the hyperbolic asymmetry is perhaps what Aquinas wants to preserve. But here we are not speaking of a kind of autarchic self-subsistence for whom relativity to the other is a breach of absoluteness. An agapeic source is an absolute love, and while its truth exceeds the dimensions of the finite interplay, there is no need for us to deny movements between the creation and the source; movements that with

diffidence we may have to speak in terms of the language of finite interplays, and hence loves, including erotic love, but the diffidence also knows that this is not quite what it is. A principled objection to an interplay between origin and creation is not at all necessary, if the origin is agapeic. Indeed the very asymmetry of the original bringing to be is itself a sign, hyperbole, communicated that there is a love *between the origin and creation*, a love that as agapeic is more absolutely free than even the asymmetries of the transcendent heights. That is to say, this agapeic origin is with the creation, and the creature, even in the suffering of being. Creation originally is received as a passion of being, a being given to be – the *passio essendi* of finite being. God as agapeic suggests a *compassio essendi* in communication with the free gift of the *passio essendi* of finite being.¹⁶

If the first absolute relation we call creation is asymmetrical in radically giving being to be, it exceeds the economy of the interplay of beings in the finite between, of Hegel's whole mediating with itself through these beings and interplays, hence *eo ipso* exceeds his dialectical speculative logic. And while this logic can be said to have a qualified applicability to some processes of becoming, especially self-becomings in the between, it blinds us to what is more, if we claim, as Hegel does, to apply it to the whole. We become blinded to crucial happenings in the between, and between creation and the divine source. Most especially we cannot do justice to an ontology of love; cannot see that agapeic love is not a self-becoming. It is a releasing beyond itself, but not for self-becoming, but for nothing beyond the good of the other, first created in the good of the 'to be' of finitude itself; and more, a releasing of this good of the finite to be as itself a promise of agapeic being, and hence the promise of a community between the creation and the origin that exceeds both dualism and the logic of holistic immanence.

Creation, the Good of the 'to be', and the God Beyond the Whole

These remarks highlight important issues, and in my estimation, defects, in Hegel's view. The difference of origin and creation means we must affirm a difference to the divine that cannot be captured in holistic language. The unsurpassable 'twoness' between origin and creation tells against holistic claims of just the One, as well as against dualistic language that pits God against creation as opposites. This is not the nature of the origin as agapeic, nor of creation as coming to be in the ontological generosity that gives the 'to be' of finitude as good. By comparison, Hegel's speculative God reveals an afterlife of Parmenides in so far as the whole provides the ultimate horizon beyond which there is nothing. Only the Whole of wholes ('God') is bound by no external difference, even granting internal difference. It is absolute as *ab solo*: from itself alone, and all that is finite, either in antagonism to other finites, or a finite whole unto itself, is 'from' this absolute. 'From' not in the sense of being 'outside' it, for this is impossible, but 'from' as within it, immanent in it as determining its own internal self-differentiation.

Of course, Hegel is attractive to some because his holistic god seems to get rid of the need for transcendence, usually understood in strongly dualistic terms. But is this Whole of wholes enough? Is pantheism, or now pan-en-theism? If the language of the whole finally has the last word, it is because it has had the first silent word,

determining this outcome from the start, but this first word only counterfeits the first words, in so far as it is silent about the true first, and the issue of creation. Perhaps this otherness of the first word of God cannot be expressed in the terms of dualism, but neither can it in the terms of speculative dialectic. In our postmodern age that glories so much in otherness, it is worth pondering whether this otherness of God still makes us squirm, perhaps because we identify it too much with the cartoon versions of Platonism taken up too uncritically from thinkers like Nietzsche. Some postmodern thinkers try to exorcize some of the spirits of holistic language, but hesitate to advance to ultimacy beyond holism. It seems enough to fall back on the deconstruction of univocity, and the celebration of our equivocality, rather than transcending the questionable closures of dialectic towards the God beyond the whole.

The thought of this God beyond the whole would require another extensive investigation (to be pursued in *God and the Between*), and the hyperbolic thought of creation is not the only basis on which it is to be pursued. The agapeic origin is the God beyond the whole, for the whole is the finite creation as given its being for itself. That whole has come to be. What has come to be as the finite whole, and all finite wholes within that whole, are contingent: they happen to be. 'Beyond' here is not to be understood dualistically: first it names an origin that communicates beyond itself in giving finite being to be; that communication opens up a beyond, beyond itself, and hence a space of intermediation between the origin and creation; and the creation it gives is itself a between as possibilizing the astonishingly prodigious plurality of beings, each defined doubly, in terms of the intermediation with other-being, and their own self-mediation. This prodigious plurality is a 'beyond' in immanence itself, in that no finite creature is on a par with it. The point is not quantitative, for you might say in principle the human being is on a par with the many other things. The disproportion is qualitative in that their being there at all, the astonishing aesthetic beauty they show, the enigmatic ontological good they display, the extraordinary excessive transcending humans themselves manifest, these and more, point beyond themselves, beyond finitude in finiteness itself. I name some of the hyperboles of being. They point beyond themselves, not to a whole that includes them all, but to an ultimate power that is hyperbolic again to the creation as a happening of contingency.

We have a different way to address the question: can Hegel count to two? For agapeic origination suggests the arising of prodigious plurality, in the sense of the giving to be, that gives rises to *more* than the One. It is not the self-redoubling of the One, but the redoubling of finite manyness as other to any self-redoubling One. The agapeic One redoubles its giving, but it does not redouble itself here to give itself to itself, but frees the finite into its being for itself. If we do not preserve the thought of the God beyond the whole, we end up as pantheistic, even pan-en-theistic, idolaters. Who could worship the Whole (of wholes) – even though one might admire it, be astonished by it, even be in awe of it? Worship is communicated in a different dimension. It is love in the dimension of the hyperbolic, where the God loved is absolutely other in absolute intimacy. Only in worship are absolute otherness and absolute intimacy at one. If God is beyond the whole, Hegel's language of holistic immanence counterfeits worship. Its *Gottesdienst* serves a false double of God.

One last but absolutely crucial point. Creation is inseparable also from the *good* of the giving of being, the good of the finite 'to be'. This is an ontological sense of good in finite being that issues from the good being of the origin itself. The good of the finite 'to be' refers beyond itself to a more primal giving source, itself good in a hyperbolic sense: surplus being good, superfluous good. Because it is surplus as superfluous, it appears to disappear in the gift it gives; and in so seeming to be superfluous in a negative sense, it can be misinterpreted by creatures as not being there at all. In a sense, it is not there, since it has made a way for the finite other; hence its being there is its not being there as taking over the middle space of the between. This is just the generosity of the good that gives way, and hence its gift can be mis-taken as no gift at all, for the goodness of the giver, as it were, reserves itself in an incognito, in the giving itself – all this in order to be, so to say, giving (as) giving, and not Aristotle's or Hegel's thinking thinking thinking.

Where in Hegel is this sense of ontological good in finite being, and the primal surplus of the divine giving good? Granted Hegel does want a God who is ethical and hence only with the Jews do we really get a proper sense of God – God not just as any power, but as an ethical power. And undoubtedly he reiterates that ethical conduct is the highest worship. Here you see the shadow of Kant falling over Hegel too, though not in the moralistic form that we find in Kant himself (see *Enz*, § 552). God and goodness come to be dialectically joined by Hegel. But they *become* joined. What of the origin itself? Here we are again entangled in all the equivocalities of Hegel's way of thinking. Just as the indeterminate origin has to become to become itself, so Hegel does not give due weight to the good of the origin. Goodness emerges in a process of development, in which more explicit teleological considerations come to the fore. There is no archaeology of the good in Hegel. As his view of creation does not satisfy, so also what he says about the good is all essentially skewed towards the end and away from the origin. There in the end, he wrongly thinks he has exorcised transcendence as other in holistic immanence and fulfilled self-determining being. But if there is no good in the origin, how on earth are we to get it in the between, and even more, how get it in the end? The end turns out to be no good, and hence we seek another end, and oddly enough, we end up with the 'bad infinity' that Hegel so heartily despised.

This is why the 'It is good' connected with original creation is so significant. A purely erotic origin cannot do justice to this 'It is good'. The lacking beginning of eros cannot remedy itself entirely through itself, since it will only redouble itself in its own self-becoming, and end up as lacking in the middle and the end, as it was in the beginning. One of Hegel's defects here is the lack of something like Plato's archeology of the Good: the good as itself an originating principle that communicates good to the finite to be; finite being is a concretion of being as 'good'. And even though as finite there are equivocalities that open the space of freedom, and hence the possibility of defection from the promise of being good, nevertheless, the defection is only possible on the basis of the more original promise of the good. All of this makes much more sense in terms of an agapeic origin. The origin is not lacking; from surplus good the finite good of being is offered; and hence, despite its being given to be *ex nihilo*, the 'It is good', more primally, is ontologically constitutive of the being of the finite. The otherness of the finite as good is consolidated, affirmed in this primal 'It is very good'.

God is not congratulating himself, or mediating with self. God's seeing is sabbatical. God is looking with love on the creation as itself good, and good in itself, and for itself. We humans are to live the 'It is good' also, relative to the finite, and also in a hyperbolic life beyond holistic immanence, relative to God. We are called to being as sabbatical, and to be as sabbatical.

But – dismay now comes – what then of the sins of time?

Notes

- 1 Hegel writes: '*Die reine Idee ... ist vielmehr absolute Befreyung*'. And again: '*Die Übergehen ist also hier zu fassen, dass die Idee sich selbst entlässt, ihrer absolut sicher und in sich ruhend*' (GW, 12, 253; SL, 843). There is a sense in which in these last paragraphs of the *Logic*, not only is there no 'transition', as Hegel himself says, but in a deep sense 'nothing happens'. The writer of *Earliest System Programme of German Idealism*, supposing it is Hegel, mentions the true creation from nothing. Of course, there are those who say Hegel's *Logic* has nothing to do with God really. It has to do with thought determinations. In an important sense, not always the important sense to which they lay claim, they are right. For unfortunately, Hegel himself brings God into the picture, and unfortunately *differently* for those like us who are concerned with God. And if Hegel talks about God in a way that has nothing to do with God really, this is dissimulating playing with a counterfeit double, and hence Hegel has nothing to tell us about God, or creation. I think Hegel has almost nothing to tell us about creation, though again the theological rhetoric disguises this fact, and the hollowness of it with respect to God. 'Creation', of course is not 'causation' as a determinate effecting of a determinate state of affairs by a determinate source or origin: not determinate efficient causality. I would speak of it as a hyperbolic 'bringing to be' (see Desmond (1999c). Nor is 'creation' the self-determination of thought.

There are admirers of Hegel who trawl through his works and find a few references to *lassen* and then, *mirable dictu*, he is no longer a trinitarian monist, but an almost contemporary lover of difference and plurality. Just the entire mystery is concentrated into the word 'letting'. What kind of 'release' or 'freeing' is this? Is it any kind of *giving to be*? What must God be like to release the finite into its own being for itself? How robust is that own being for itself? A moment of the divine self-determination, again? But then it is hardly a genuine other. If it were a genuine other, would it limit the divine? But is this not a very spatialized, 'representational' way to think divine freeing, as if one whole were limited by another whole it released into its own being for itself? What if there are no circles in creation? What if creation is beyond all circular self-movement? Beyond as a giving to be: not a coming to be of God, or a self-becoming; a giving to be before all becoming or self-becoming; an agapeic letting?

Similar points apply to the relation of Idea and Nature that Marx, among others, found so problematic. When the Idea releases nature, what kind of release is this? What must the being of this source be to let this be? When Hegel talks of the *divine* Concept, he invites these questions, despite the prohibition of his admirers of the anti-metaphysical, 'demythologizing' observance who will have thought alone, and the transition from thought about thought to *thought* about nature. Hegel has sentences where he suggests that the supreme freedom is one that allows its own absolute other – releases it into its otherness. If there is any suggestion of agapeic release here, he does not think through what this could mean, but brings it all back to the speculative erotic model, where the completion of a more holistic self-becoming surpasses the extremity of the release into

real otherness – the otherness is necessarily ‘taken back’. Has Hegel a really radical freedom, be it ontological or ethical or religious? When we keep our heads down and think in terms of this or that part of his system, it sometimes seems so; but as soon as we lift up our heads and seek to see in terms of the whole, it seems not. But clearly this second standpoint is the standpoint from which Hegel makes his claims to comprehend the trinity (to comprehend in a trinitarian way). On Hegel and nature, see Houlgate, ed. (1998).

- 2 LPR, 129–30, when speaking of the primal division Hegel says: ‘this is creation of the world and of the subjective spirit for which God is object. Spirit is an absolute manifesting ... ‘Manifesting’ means ‘creating an other’ ... The making or creation of the world is God’s self-manifesting, self-revealing. In a further and later definition we will have this manifestation in the higher form that what God creates God himself is, that in general it does not have the determinateness of an other, that God is manifestation of his own self, that God is for himself – the other (which has the empty semblance of [being] an other but is immediately reconciled), the Son of God or human being according to the divine image’.
- 3 See Desmond (1999c).
- 4 See the concluding remarks of Desmond (1999d).
- 5 LPR, 369–70: Hegel’s remarks concerning Job’s confidence in God seem to me to offer a superbly bland reading of Job. No doubt he is not wrong to stress the trust in God, and perhaps also the harmony between power and wisdom. I do not find enough of the *nakedness* of being religious in Hegel. Job: Naked I came into the world, naked I go. The Lord gives, the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of God. This nakedness reveals the human being as *passio essendi*, in the ultimate porosity of its relation to God: this is religious communication between us and the origin, beyond self-determination, beyond *conatus essendi*. Nakedness has to do with our being blessed, our being cursed. God alone is blessed. I do not find in Hegel finesse for this porosity beyond all self-determination; not finesse for the gift, the being given of creation; not finesse enough for the offering back of the gift in nakedness; not finesse for nakedness in coming to be and nakedness in going hence.
- 6 Yovel (1998) seems to find Hegel more anti-Semitic than Nietzsche.
- 7 See the paragraph in *PhG*, 536–7, *PS*, § 774, where creation is said to be *just a Vorstellung*, with all the speculative relativization that this entails, and in my view speculative misunderstanding. This early paragraph is a kind of *template* for everything the later Hegel will say about ‘creation’. If so, Hegel learned *almost nothing* about creation in the remaining almost quarter-century of his life. His thinking settled down in this counterfeit double of creation.
- 8 While very critical about Hegel, Levinas (1969) is perhaps closer to Hegel than he admits when he says rather indiscriminately of ‘theology’: ‘Theology imprudently treats the idea of the relation between God and the creature in terms of ontology. It presupposes the logical privilege of totality, as a concept adequate to being.’ What Levinas says is not true to the hyperbolic thought of creation, nor to origin beyond holism, nor to the difference of coming to be and becoming (see below). On his reversion to Judaism and turn away from Hegel, Rosenzweig (1985, 134ff.) devoted some more extended reflection to creation, by contrast with idealistic emanation.
- 9 Heidegger seems to impute this also to Christian theology (whether unwittingly, or wittingly, or willfully, I will not venture.) On Heidegger promising much, but leaving one deflated by the delivery, see Desmond (2003, Chapter 7). In his famous *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre is remarkably crude in the ‘technical’ way he talks, rather does not talk, of God’s ‘creation’.
- 10 If for Kant, thought concerns the possible, existence the posited, for Hegel thought is

self-positing possibility, hence not mere possibility, but possibilizing power that is self-actualizing. His 'God' instantiates this transcendental logic. Kant's dualism may be entrenched within finitude, but *contra* Hegel, the real question is more the twofoldness between finitude and what is more: how the excess of finite being calls us above itself to that more; how the between is a way to transcendence along which the hyperbolic leads us. We need more than possibility/posited existence, more than possibilizing as self-positing thinking. 'Possibilizing' is (more) radical with creation as bringing to be. 'Possibilizing' may not be the best word, if it drags us back to these other senses. Origin cannot be possibility, if its creating is supreme, and absolutely singular bringing to be. It must be *hyper* this doublet of categories as applicable to finite beings. In that regard, it is hypercategorical. Hegel does not think the hypercategorical, since everything he claims is contained in his category. See how I described T3 in the introduction.

- 11 That Hegel would look at being thus shows his relative insensitivity to the issue at stake. He reflects the modern reduction of being to thought – not the excess of the givenness as always presupposed by thought, and never generated by thought, certainly not by human thought; and not by divine thought either, as if it were just a low-grade enactment of the divine that thinks itself. Go that way and again we destroy the essential difference.
- 12 See Desmond (2000a).
- 13 Though you will not find much trace of this register in his view of property in his *Philosophy of Right*. The will takes possession of what in nature has no inherent worth. Hegel here shows himself to be deficient in the sense of being a gift, gift itself as subtending possession and use.
- 14 Hegel (*LPR*, 370) mentions the Psalms and the prophets as descending into the depths – he mentions this descent but that is about it. The *Lecture on Aesthetics* discusses the Psalms as sublime, and Hegel is not insensitive, but again when we understand the picture of the whole that Hegel wants to recommend to us, their sublime song of transcendence as other, as well as the glory of creation, must and will be relativized by him.
- 15 T3 points to an original power more than any determinate entity or process of happening that is defined in the differentiation process. Its excess to determinacy means another sense of difference not reducible to the determinate differences defined in the differential network of a dynamic becoming or the mediation of this process in terms of an immanent whole. Nor will any projected totality, whether it is Kant's regulative unconditioned or Hegel's constitutive unconditioned, do justice to the 'more' of this transcendence (T3).
- 16 See Desmond (2001b).

Chapter 6

Evil and the Counterfeits of God in History

Deus sive historia?

Perhaps such thoughts of creation are too high above us, so let us come down to things we appear to know more intimately – evil, for instance. Hegel does not want anything to go over our heads, he wants to show what is before our noses. So his erotic trinitarianism overreaches history as well as creation. Here we find Hegel's concern with the struggles of time and absolute reconciliation, represented religiously in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hegel's admirers are drawn by his ambition to take history seriously. Talk of creation is not all, one might agree, for humans not only live in creation, not only are creatures of nature, but also subjects of history, where the issue is said to be human self-creation. Must not a persuasive philosophy of God do justice to human self-creation in this more historical sense? Are God's creation and human self-creation logically incompatible, as Sartre claims, the first absolutely determining, the second self-determining in a way without precedent? Can the two be held together, or reconciled, as they must, if we affirm God as possibilizing human freedom, rather than undercutting its openness?

Hegel wants the two, but how? The relation of God and history is at stake. Here we approach the historical concretion of the relation of two forms of transcendence: human self-transcendence (T2) and divine transcendence (T3). Hegel's answer, not surprisingly, shows the same character we have seen elsewhere in his system: the determination of God through history is God's self-determination, and humankind's own self-determination is effected in the inclusive self-determination of the Whole of wholes. Transcendence, whether God's or ours, is to be understood in terms of immanent self-determination: there is no other transcendence ultimately. I detect a historicist transformation of Spinoza: not now the univocal determining power of *deus sive natura*, but the dialectical self-determining power of *deus sive historia*. In the equivocalities of time, the historicized whole effects the unity of divine and human self-determination.

Needless to say, problems analogous to those dogging *deus sive natura* haunt *deus sive historia*. Among them: the status of human freedom as truly other to divine self-determination; the standing of singularity as being for itself; evil as exceeding a logic, not only of determination, but of self-determination; the weakening of the difference of God in the blurred boundary that is marked, or not marked, by the word *sive* – giving us *history as god*, as before we had *nature as god*, though none are God. If God and humankind both become absolutely self-determining, must they not collapse into each other? Would such a dissolving of the difference

solve anything and rather not be a counterfeit reconciliation? What then of the *community* of divine freedom and human? This is a question that will extend to the next chapter on spirit.

It is often said that previous philosophers, in the shoes of 'Plato', shunned time for eternity, and ended up with a God that has nothing to do with the world of historical becoming. Hegel's antagonists charge him with guilt on this. Thus Kierkegaard: speculation places humans in a position of absolute abstraction *sub specie aeternitatis*. For religious reasons Kierkegaard excoriates Hegel's distortion of the specificity of Christianity as witnessing the paradoxical conjunction of the eternal and the temporal. Kierkegaard notwithstanding, Hegel's speculative concept does try to address claims that God is implicated in history, beyond any dualistic opposition of time and eternity. That Hegel was aware of aporiai connected to any dualism of time and eternity does not mean there is no justice in Kierkegaard's protest, even if one might not put this quite in Kierkegaard's terms.

Hegel presents his philosophy of history as a theodicy, one different to Leibniz's in this regard.¹ Leibniz offers a rational argument said to hold together the absolute goodness and power of God, and without denial of the 'reality' of evil. The rational argument is said to carry the weight of persuasiveness. But what if evil is more than a question of logical possibility and rational coherence? Has it not also to do with the 'slaughterbench of history', as Hegel puts it. If there is a theodicy, it has to face up to the blood spilled in history, not only to the logical coherence of rational possibilities. Hegel's theodicy claims the former: spilt blood can be rationally transformed, and so justified. Does Hegel then show an amplitude of openness greater than Leibniz's rationalizing? Yes and no. For is there not a sting in the claim to provide the measure of the otherness of evil? Claims more ambitious than 'mere' logical coherence, perhaps even hyperbolic claims, are being made for reason: the power to take the measure of this (negative) otherness of evil, and to show its necessity in the whole. One might say: Hegel's theodicy is the rational history of God's reconciliation with *Godself*. His self-overreaching trinity, via its philosophical *Aufhebung* of the death and resurrection of Christ, does the evil on itself and undoes it, and so justifies the (speculative-dialectical) *necessity* of evil as necessary for God's own self-reconciliation. But who or what is being most exonerated here: God or evil?

We must also bear in mind the fact that Hegel receives very competing evaluations: Hegel took time seriously (Marx, in one regard), Hegel did not take it seriously (Kierkegaard); Hegel took eternity too seriously (Marx, in another regard), Hegel did not take it seriously enough (Kierkegaard also in another regard). These evaluations again make us wonder about Hegel's equivocity. Are we encountering again less a dialectical resolution than a dialectical equivocity: a dialectic that seems to overcome the equivocity, but that only masks it, at a putatively higher level of rational considerations? This is another aspect of the problem of the counterfeit double: a likeness to the Biblical God as involved with history, but yet so involved that history seems to take over from that God, and with results quite other to the Biblical hope: history as the absolute standard. Not only the *Schlachtbank* of history but also: *die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*. Even the Last Judgement, it seems, will be refused its transcendence. The historical god will be criminal and judge, crucified and crucifier, redeemer and redeemed. But what god is this that

needs to be redeemed, needs to redeem itself? And if there is nothing transcendent to history, is it, as Hobbes described the Leviathan, a 'mortal god'? But why should we sing a speculative *Te Deum* to this monster? Does this being true to history become false to God, hence untrue to history?

Beyond the Catatonic God or its Surprising Speculative Return?

The aporiai of time and eternity are connected with what one might call the catatonic god. This is not Hegel's term but one can see him as claiming to be beyond such a view. The catatonic god would be so absolutely for itself (*kath auto*) that it could not be for finitude as other to itself.² This idea of a catatonic god arises in reaction to the ongoing process of time as seemingly equivocal: as a becoming, this process is, but it is not fully, and hence it is not yet what it will become: time is not what it is to be, and so it seems to be in contradiction to itself, in being itself. Philosophers have looked on time thus as a double and seemingly self-contradictory process, and have sought beyond it for an eternal univocity.

Parmenides' sphere of absolute homogenous being may be the extreme form of this response. Absolute being is absolutely for itself; becoming is never fully being for itself, always for an other. We reach this pure one by negation of the negative equivocality of time: eternity is what time is not. But if eternity is what time is not, a univocity beyond equivocality, then we redouble the difficulty. To gain being in time we look beyond time, but beyond time, we erect a dualism of time and eternity, and hence eternity has nothing to do with time, and hence while being beyond time, we properly cannot relate to time anymore, and so we redouble our failure to gain being in time. Eternity seemed to ground our relation to time; now it breaks that relation; in completing its function, it seems to be self-subverting. The *not* between time and eternity, makes the second other in absolute separation, and hence having nothing to do with time, hence adding nothing to our being in time. Even if we can account for the way up, we cannot explain the way down. But we must explain the way down, if the point is to reorient us to time. Grounded in that univocal eternity, the equivocality of time is more ungrounded, and we are not only back where we started, but we inhabit the equivocality of time with a taste for the possible futility of eternity. It is as if an extreme eternalism that makes time unreal, recoils into a temporalism which is total. The eternal idea as *auto kath auto* rebounds to time as in and for itself, as also *auto kath auto* – the eternal return of the same. 'Plato', a catatonic eternalist breeds 'Nietzsche', a catatonic temporalist.

Hegel does not quite fit either view. This dualism of time and eternity, whether resulting in the absolute privilege of one extreme or the other, does not do justice to either pole, and hence we need a rethinking of the two, and especially their mediation. Dualism may have its rights in directing us to differences, it does not have right enough in denying the mediation of the difference. A truer account must allow for the mediation, and this is seen by Hegel, at least initially, to work from two directions: from time to eternity, from eternity to time. In fact, it must be stated in terms of both, to do justice to each term as itself internally dynamic and mediated. The point is very evident with time itself, which cannot be reduced to catatonic terms, since its being as process is in being other to fixed identity: always in

becoming, it is never absolutely fixed as static identity. Nothing in time is absolutely for itself, but everything moves beyond such fixed identity: time is the internal vector of itself towards its own other.

But similar considerations apply to eternity. An absolutely catatonic God would be the abstraction of undifferentiated identity for Hegel. If God is for self, it is also, as itself, other to itself, and in that sense for another. It externalizes itself, something impossible purely on catatonic terms; and so there is a mediation from eternity to time. Here we can recall Hegel's more general claim that every religion in some manner shows the self-disclosure of the divine, and his more specific claims about Biblical religion, and most consummately Christianity, that this self-disclosure is in the happening of history itself. The very nature of religion is just the overcoming of the dualism of time and eternity, be it the elevation of time to the eternal, or the disclosure of the eternal in time. We seem to be beyond the catatonic god. History itself is transformed from within its own immanence through the absolute that is disclosing itself in temporal unfolding.

For all that, I find a problem. The way down and the way up both show the impossibility of catatonic identity in a fixed static sense; every identity exceeds itself towards its own other; eternity does, time does; but in exceeding themselves towards their other, they are mediating with themselves in this otherness. The divine identity is the self-overcoming of catatonia in the mute, undifferentiated sense; is self-disclosive, and shows itself in its own otherness, and in this showing, comes to know itself for what it is; it becomes itself, it recognizes itself in its other, it attains self-recognition in [absolute] otherness. This applies whether from the side of time or eternity. The difference of the two is subtended by this sameness. As each shows the process of the becoming of the whole, each contributes to the full self-becoming of the whole. The absolute whole mediates itself to itself, whether from the side of eternity's mediating through time, or time's mediation through eternity. Thus the circle is completed and closed. But when we arrive here, is it so clear we have left behind the catatonic god after all?

In one form, yes: mute, differenceless identity. But has the situation only been transmuted into a dialectical-speculative form? The catatonic god of absolute non-disclosure has been dialectically transformed into the catatonic god of absolute self-disclosure. This 'second' catatonic god mediates completely with itself through its own other. God catatonic in and for itself – this 'God' is absolute self-disclosure, and there is nothing 'outside' it, and hence the disclosure is just to itself and what is immanent in it. Communication is absolute self-communication. But there is no irreducible other to be in communication with, as 'outside'. There is no 'outside'. Absolute communication, absolute self-disclosure, absolute catatonia coincide. Does not Hegel, then, return to the catatonic god at the end, at the level of a putatively higher speculative univocity: the god that is not only in itself but in and for itself?

This self-disclosing God is not a god of dualistic opposition, but a God creating itself as other in time, and in this otherness of time coming to its own self-recognition. Dualism is transcended, not to an outside eternity, but rather in the direction of the complete self-mediation of the divine in immanence itself. History is the process of the immanence of the catatonic god of time itself. It is a shorter step than one would think to Nietzsche's rhapsodic version of this self-circulating ultimate.³ Once again, there is no final other, no final beyond, no irreducible

transcendence, and the circle of the whole closes in on itself. It is a self-circulating catatonic god within which there is a world of difference, but it never goes outside itself, for the notion of any 'outside' has been made utterly unintelligible by this conception. Cruder versions will collapse less unabashedly the difference of eternity and time, God and finitude; and while Hegel is more finessed than this, these cruder versions are the dragon's seeds that have sprung up and revealed the recessive implication immanent in the entire position. But I must explain further with reference to Hegel's view of history and religion.

Beyond the Double Vision of Time and Eternity

If history is the immanent self-becoming of eternity, we must pay attention to Hegel's method of procedure. Hegel does not start with our being in the between, and move from there to transcendence. At the outset, there is reference to an undifferentiated unity, or an indeterminate universality, that then differentiates itself. Thus the discussion of the One, Being (taking up an earlier thematic from Hölderlin) that dirempts itself: the original *Urteil*. The undifferentiated unity is, in a way, like a catatonic god, but seemingly unlike it, it differentiates itself – it dirempts itself in time. Starting with unity, Hegel traverses a development that returns to unity. If this looks like the neo-Platonic scheme of exitus and reditus, nevertheless post-Kantian, transcendental, speculative claims are made for it, merged with Christian claims about the fullness of time, and by implication the end of history, themes not thus present in neo-Platonic speculative thought.

If we take our bearings by Hegel's survey of the different religions, one might say: the different religions both *simulate* and *dissimulate* the divine in history. In a sense, every religion both *shows* and *counterfeits* the absolute in time. Nevertheless, there is a dynamic and telos to this. At the end of the play of this divine simulation and dissimulation, show and counterfeit, God shows himself absolutely in Christianity. Meanwhile Hegel himself 'comes on the scene' to offer the philosophy of absolute show, surpassing all counterfeits of the absolute. My question comes again, tiresome but untiring: does this claim counterfeit the show of God in time, and produce its own counterfeit double?

Hegel's starting point is in the East, in the Oriental world. What we find prevailing there is the dominance of undifferentiated unity, hence religions of nature, and overall an economy of thinking in which pantheistic orientations reign. This unity must differentiate itself – a schema that, more or less, repeats itself in a variety of guises in Hegel. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, the scheme of development goes like this: first the Oriental, then the Greek, then the Roman, finally the Germanic: 'World history travels from east to west; for Europe is the absolute end of history, just as Asia is the beginning.' In the East one was free, in Greece and Rome some were free, and finally in our Germanic, (Northern) Christian epoch, we know that all are free. We find the patriarchal principle in the Orient, reflecting identity and undifferentiated totality. There is the emergence of differences within nature itself, and of spirit as other to nature, as we move towards Greece: there the difference of nature and spirit achieves a balance but in terms of a more aesthetic harmony. Some were free. Then there is the universalizing drive of spirit.

Philosophy is crucial here, but philosophy is for the few not the many, not all. It is with Christianity that freedom for the many, for all emerges: the emergence of the spiritual principle of identity. Here is subjectivity in its infinite inwardness, and hence, for Hegel, radically immanent freedom as self-determination. It will take centuries for this to percolate through societies, churches, empires. There are complications here which need not detain us, such as the Roman abstract universal of the legal person, medieval Catholicism and the return to patriarchal heteronomy in Christendom. Crucially, the Reformation restores spiritual freedom against this heteronomy. True, this is still only spiritual, and it is the French Revolution that ushers in the worldly consummation of the Reformation: universal self-determining freedom embodied in the worldly immanent totality of the modern state. There is no more beyond, no transcendence with this spiritual completion of immanence, with this god on earth.

Hegel's different series of lectures mirror each other, with the accent shifting, but the form remaining relatively stable, from art, to politics and power, to religious doctrines and ethical ways. A brief glance at Hegel's philosophy of art is instructive. While this can be seen as an aesthetics in a more conventional sense, it is also much more. It offers a hermeneutical reading of the history of art, itself inseparable from the history of religions, and both informed by systematic perspectives that recur as the habitual pattern of conceptual determinations that informs all Hegel's thinking. Again and again we find the move from undifferentiated unity, through difference, posed as opposites, and also mediated in a variety of ways, towards self-determining mediation.

See how this is refracted in the basic forms of art, each of which is also religious in its own way. Symbolic art: the religious note is totally overt here, since we are in the immediate whole of ancient, primitive pantheisms. The spirit is at a beginning, undeveloped, lost in its own indeterminate indefiniteness, but struggling to overcome it, and its immersion in nature as the engulfing whole. Hegel thinks of the pyramids and the Sphinx as exemplary of the show of riddle and mystery. But the show is spiritually deficient, hence also a counterfeit of what it secretly aims to show. The art of Judaism, such as we find in the psalms, reflects Judaism as a religion of the sublime: a more absolute show. As we saw, Hegel wavered where to place Judaism. Sometimes it is the religion of the slave, servile before the letter of the law of the domineering master; sometimes it is a religion of the absoluteness of the absolute, as entirely superior to nature, to the point of being severed from it, making the world godless. Pantheistic unity is dirempted into sublime dualism. But the absoluteness of one of the terms of the duality casts the other term into a merely negative role, and finally we have to transcend that too. The negative evaluation of Hegel of dualistic transcendence never wavers.

Hegel's account of Classical art follows from the differentiation of the natural, and the overcoming of dualism: the ascent of the human above nature into its own being for itself: the humanism of the Greeks is not alienated from the aesthetic happening of nature. An aesthetic, immediate unity is shown of nature and spirit. Worth noting is that in Hegel's discussion of art, there is an account of the war of the Titans and the Olympians more extensive than in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, though there he refers to the gigantomachia as the essence of Greek religion (LPR, 333) The point is humanity's emergence from the more barbarous

power of nature, and the elevation of spirit into its own freedom for itself. This is not nature negated, not simply opposed, as we see with the sculpture of the gods: the human body elevated to the idealism of the sensuous: the Ideal. *Aesthetically* this is superior to Judaic sublimity. Here the aesthetic god is unsurpassable. What is hard to appropriate about Judaism is its transcendence of aesthetic gods. This is something deficient, for Hegel, if posited in terms of dualistic transcendence, but something positive if grasped in terms of the spirit's surpassing of nature and sensuous immediacy – surpassing not to entrench dualism, but to overcome dualism at an even more comprehensive level in terms of spirit itself, and which brings the spirit back to earth, back to history. Then we need not the aesthetic resolution but the more fully religious resolution, in which the aesthetic god is surpassed by the God of spirit – surpassed, that is, in immanence itself. The aesthetic god shows and dissimulates, Hegel's God of Spirit will show finally beyond all dissimulation.

In surpassing the Ideal, the Idea in sensuous form, Romantic art initiates the last show. It shows the 'coming on the scene' of inwardness in its immanent infinity. Subjectivity becomes the name of the absolute power. This is already present in the Jewish God, who is not only a power, but a moral power, hence more than mere power. But most crucially, the infinite as immanent, as within – whether immanent in self, or community, or history – this shows the true spirit, and Christianity shows this. Christianity is not only the religion of the infinite but of the immanent infinite, for Hegel. Romantic art is one in which the human being no longer can find itself fully at home in the sensuous other. Granted the long development of Romantic art, one example, also religiously relevant, will bring us to modernity: Hamlet. 'Seems, madam I know not seems, but I have that within which passes show.' What passes show? For Hegel, spirit passes sensuous show, but not show *per se*, since spirit is essentially self-showing. One can see here the dialectic of the unhappy consciousness raised to a new pitch of intensity in inwardness itself. The labyrinth of the heart, and the excess of immanent subjectivity, certainly is a problem in art, for it seems to have no satisfying 'objective correlative'. Subjectivity overreaches all objects, and hence can find no rest in such restricted forms of otherness. It can only find rest when the otherness is its own otherness. It must build the world as the image of spirit at home with itself.

This absolute task is signalled in the tortured lacerations of art, but no art, considered as human expression, has the power to heal the laceration. Only spirit can heal, and this must take a more explicitly religious form to effect the overcoming of the homelessness. Of course, this also intensifies the inner torment, but this also must be redeemed: the return of opposition and alienation, not between immanence and transcendence, the human being and an external god, but within immanence itself, between immanent subjectivity and its own other, its own transcendence. This strife will be fought in immanence itself, now that we putatively have overcome the more primitive difference between immanence and an external transcendence. The latter has vanished, for Hegel: a bewitchment has been lifted. The play of show and counterfeit is approaching its end.

So we come more overtly to religion as religion. Again we see the above moves – from undifferentiated unity through difference and opposition to self-mediating unity – mirrored in the development of the religions in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. The meaning of religion is inseparable from spirit, but spirit is not

always at one with itself in the form of spirit – it seems its necessary destiny first to be given over to the alienation of nature, which of course is itself, but it does not know this at the outset. It shows itself and counterfeits itself and frees itself from its own counterfeit by understanding itself more fully as self-showing. It is under the alienating bewitchment of its own other, and has to dispel this to come to itself, spirit as spirit. The witness of spirit to spirit – this is the core of religion for Hegel, the point where the bewitchment of the counterfeit gives way to self-show.

Hegel begins as always in the Orient where spirit is sunken in nature, and hence at the beginning lost in an undeveloped indeterminacy which, nevertheless for Hegel is inseparable from the universal One. So we have a concretion of modes of spirit that diversely seek their own self-determination through nature, but only in a variety of weak forms managing to rise above it into their own element. This foreignness of the natural has to be overcome, in order for spirit properly to return to itself. Spirit is destined to move westward. More explicit difference occurs in Persian religion, where we have the doubling of principles between good and evil. Hegel's point is the necessity of diremption, even to the point of dualism, not for itself, but as a stage in the self-development of spirit. Egyptian religion is important in relation to death and the negative, and spirit being beyond natural death. Further again we come to the religions of the Greek and the Jews. These occupied Hegel from his first efforts to find a direction, as we saw, and in some ways his admiration for the Greeks is undiminished, though as the aesthetic people, the people of *Kunstreligion*, religion in the form of art. Greek religion is a religion of humanity (LPR, 330). Have they not given us Oedipus: he who answered the sphinx and solved the riddle? The riddle was man and the answer was man. Something is shown here, but is Hegel not himself sleeping to its double-edge? The riddle of the first monster seems answered by Oedipus, but the answer, the answerer is a *second monster*, and in a different sense. Everything about Oedipus witnesses to the *disproportion* of man, the excess. Man the solver of riddles may seem to be the measure of things other to himself, but is he the measure of himself? Something about him seems to exceed measure. The Greeks knew this too, else we would not have tragedy.

Hegel is aware of the excessive power of Fate in Greece, and as we saw when discussing creation, while Fate is above gods and men, the excessive power received the name of God in Judaism. Here for Hegel, as we saw, we have God for the first time, but once again the excess of transcendence is the problem. Christianity for him leads to its overcoming, and the return of all transcendence to holistic immanence. Here too one must be on guard, for many of the moves in Judaism find their own form simulated within earlier Catholic Christianity, not least the relation to transcendence, and the form of human alienation that must remain for Hegel as long as the otherness of transcendence is not fully overcome. Yet Christianity is the consummate religion: the dualism of time and eternity is overcome, and overcome from the side of God as much as from man. The consummate self-showing of the absolute in immanence dispels the last bewitchments of counterfeit eternity.

Granted, for Hegel, even Christianity produces its counterfeit double of Hegel's God when it reverts to transcendence as other. Though what it shows is the overcoming of the unhappy consciousness, it can also originate its own form of the unhappy consciousness. The family relation of Judaism and Christianity is close

with reference to unhappy consciousness, and this is a point he shared with Nietzsche. And while Hegel wants to surpass this, he is not, it seems, intent on the more negative *polemos* towards Christianity as Nietzsche is. I wonder though if there are forms of sympathy that have much the same effect as overt hostility. If the consummate religion is still not absolute enough by clinging to the difference of human and divine, one must consider what Hegel's *complement on the heights* amounts to, if it means being judged from a *higher standpoint*. Hegelian philosophy stands above religion speculatively, perhaps wearing the face of logical reason, but nevertheless in the same family as the Nietzschean surpassing from the higher standpoint of Dionysian rhapsody. This 'going beyond' Christianity, shared by almost everyone after the Enlightenment, is what drove Kierkegaard mad.

Here Hegel's immanent trinitarianism is at its most explicit and developed. The trinitarian motif is, as we saw, a unitarian one, in that it is the One that is mediating with itself in the three representations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The same logic rules: indeterminate universality, determinate particularity, as self-particularization of the universal, the concrete universal as the individual. This is the self-determining universal or whole, the community of the absolute self-determining God. There is more to be said, but only note that this triad of preceding stages is mirrored in Father, Son and Spirit. The age of the Father is the one which begins with the pantheistic, patriarchal Orient in its many forms. The age of the Son is the post-Oriental, post-Jewish epoch of which we are participants, up to the Reformation and the French Revolution. Even though the early Christians believed Pentecost was 40 days after the resurrection, for Hegel it seems the epoch of spirit comes most to a post-religious secular epiphany in the new age beginning in Hegel's time, that of the French Revolution, which immanently fulfills the fullness of time already announced in principle and in spirit with Christianity.⁵ The trinitarian motif can be flexibly used to cover a myriad of possibilities, and whether it is too plastic is a question, but it now covers the telos of realized self-determination, the reconciliation of God and man, or man and man, or God and God. We live in the fullness of time: absolute show, the absolute is shown, and the time is complete in the immanence of the 'eternal logos'. God seems justified, justified to self as becoming himself as the socially self-determining One, God as saving himself in time. Or is it evil that is the true subject of justification?

Evil as God's Self-Disclosure

What is shown and what is counterfeited in Hegel's account of God's show and counterfeit? For Hegel, God's disclosure in history is a self-disclosure which is also God's self-determination. This can be seen either as the eternal determining itself in time, or the temporal coming to its own absolute self-determining form, its own absolutely mediated being for itself. If these are ultimately the same, I must ask again if there is not the return of the catatonic god at the speculative level? Has a plurivocal intermediation been distorted: not only with respect to the difference of directionality; not only with respect to the reduction to inclusive self-mediation; but in terms of a failure to see the 'inter', the between, as more enigmatic and open, as giving the milieu for communications that are not socially self-determining. As

the God beyond the whole has vanished, has not *evil* also become hard to see in the interstices of the speculative system? Is there such a thing as a *dialectical dissimulation of evil*? Is evil indeed a certain dialectical dissimulation of the good? I want to look a little more at this, both at what Hegel says, and what he does not say, and what he cannot say.

Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* offers his most extensive discussion of evil, though scattered throughout the large systematic works are many mentions of the issue, especially the story of the Fall as a *Vorstellung* illustrating the dialectical development of spirit. I find three kinds of emphasis. First, a *logacist* or *onto-logicist* emphasis: the same conceptual structure of dialectical self-mediation through otherness is as evident in evil as throughout the system as a whole. Second, an *existential* emphasis: particularity is important, but also to be surpassed. Third, a *world historical* emphasis: if there is a tension, even opposition, between existence and logic, it is teleologically resolved, and evil sublated in the reconciled end in history.⁵

Does this end soften the horror of evil? Or does the teleology of world history redirect us from the existential, and its particularity, towards the onto-logical, and its universality? Hegel might claim that the historical is a temporal concretion of what the onto-logic articulates in its abstract universality. And yet it gives pride of place to the universal, overplaying the logical, while understating the existential. Everything recalcitrant about the existential yields to the logic of the concept, and evil proves *rationally necessary* to the whole. Not only does the speculative concept comprehend evil, but evil itself embodies the logic of the concept. Evil itself is first necessitated by the self-determination of the logical concept, or in theological terms, God's own self-determination. But this means evil is God's *self-disclosure*. What manner of God is this?

One can see how this threefold emphasis, onto-logical, existential and world-historical, is connected with his trinitarian view of God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Here in the discussion of evil the threefold emphasis has special reference for the second moment of the divine life. This second moment is *God's* manifestation in finite nature, represented by the Son. This is a *necessary moment* of the absolute as appearance, as *determinacy*. God is other to God in Himself in the finitude of the created world which, in turn, is the self-othering of God. Evil, for Hegel, is bound up with finitude as such and a certain freedom. The finite world is 'let go' as independent by the Idea in its own self-particularization. The finite world is the *heteron*, the other (LPR, 435). Evil is essentially connected with otherness, and this itself is the self-othering of God.

The same necessity applies to the human being. For Hegel humanity is given over to estrangement from the immediacy of natural being. Natural humanity is neither good nor evil, it is simply innocent. The human being as *spirit* is evil by nature, that is, by a necessary requirement of its being. Hegel speaks of *cleavage* (*Entzweiung*) within the subject: the being of the human is contradiction – this is the necessary disjunction between the human being as a particular and its concept. This is simply an ontological structure inherent in being human: internal difference necessarily defines our being. For Hegel nature is bound up with both innocence and evil. To step out of immediate unity with nature, evil as cleavage is necessary for the self-development of the human. In so far as the human being tears itself

loose from immediate nature and insists on itself as difference, it is evil. But this is necessary for us to *become ethically good*. Evil, dialectically speaking, is *necessary* for becoming ethical good.

Hegel is not entirely opposed by Schopenhauer who held that *to be is evil*, a view shadowing Nietzsche, and one with long ancestry in pre-Socratic thought, in Anaximander, for instance. The rupture, the cleavage is ontologically constitutive, and is explained by Hegel in terms of spirit, not nature. This rupture relates as much to the *divine life* as to the human. Like Augustine or Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Hegel underscores *the will* in its self-insistent particularity (LPR, 440–1). Such self-insistent ‘thisness’ is intimately bound up with the condition of evil. Anaximander: tearing themselves from *to apeiron*, particular things violate the original whole, incur the wrath of its justice, *diké*, and meet the punishment of particularity: death.⁶ Differentiation *per se* is the ontological sin, the *Ur-teil* of the original whole. The concept is identified with good and particularity as particularity is identified with evil.⁷ Good and evil, even in their essential contradiction, are dialectically bound to each other in their very opposition.

Hegel uses the *Vorstellung* of the Fall (see most notably the *Enz*, § 24, *Zusatz*) to illustrate the logical and ontological necessity of differentiation. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, his most extensive discussion, he rejects any (literal) historical interpretation of the representation.⁸ The importance of *knowing* is stressed. Knowing and the cleavage are inseparable with humans, whereas animals lack the free self-relation, being-for-self. Hegel wants to universalize the implicit meaning of the Fall: he is concerned with implicit humanity *according to its concept*, not the represented individuals, Adam or Eve. Even the notion of inherited sin is tied to the *Begriff*, not to some quasi-biological inheritance. As Hegel says: all humanity as humanity enters into this cleavage; nevertheless this cleavage is also the midpoint of the conversion that consciousness contains within itself, whereby this cleavage is sublated (LPR, 444). Hence knowing this necessity is also a *dialectical elevation* of the human being through evil. Hegel takes some glee in pointing out that the promise of the serpent was redeemed: the serpent did not lie, humans beings will become as gods in eating of the tree of knowledge. And this outcome is not contradicted by God who says: Look, they have become like us!

This God, Hegel also claims, drove Adam out of the Garden, lest they eat the tree of life and become immortal (LPR, 445). But which ‘God’ is this that Hegel likes to see discomfited? Is it Hegel’s own God? Obviously not. It seems more like the jealous Jewish God, the *other* evil God, the God envious of humans. Hardly masked intimations of the gnostic view are evident. Hegel speaks words both straight and crooked when he speaks of ‘God’ here. There is a masked agon of two ‘gods’ begging to be unmasked – a task Hegel’s whole account can be seen as trying to accomplish. And overall, there is absolutely nothing said about the God who sees ‘It is good’, the God who is not envious, but who is not Hegel’s own ‘God’.

In any case, it is this *knowing* of good and evil that will make us gods, fruit of the fall that proves dialectically necessary to the self-elevation of humanity. But if the transgression is necessary, does this not alter its taint *qua* transgression? If the transgression *had to be*, if humanity were to become the spirit it implicitly is, is this not a rational justification of evil’s necessity? In vindicating the serpent, does this

rational necessity bow in the direction of the Prince of Darkness? For Hegel the Prince of Darkness is Lucifer, the first-born Son of Light (*LPR*, 435: see also *PhG*, 538; *PS*, 468). Notice that knowing is also emphasized by Hegel in relation to the *tree of life*. While *Vorstellung* is childlike, it is only in knowing that humanity is immortal: 'Cognition and thought are the root of human life, of human immortality as a totality within itself' (*LPR*, 446).

The religious person who thinks the issue is personal immortality will be speculatively consoled but cheated of any 'merely' singular consolation. (How much slippage there is in this 'merely'! Much more than a mere 'mere'.) Hegelian immortality is in the knowing of humanity as a spiritual totality. Does Hegel counterfeit the religious representation while insisting he conceptually comprehends it in truth? The identity card is marked 'religious' but the figure in the picture seems somehow changed, even though the happy carrier of the card now is led to believe that at last the true identity of our religious destiny has been revealed. A conceptual changeling has been dialectically substituted. We look for more intimate continuity between concept and representation, despite claims made to preserve this out and out. A difference is being downplayed, making it easier to fudge a choice, or to whistle metaphysically, as if no conflict could be here, though, in fact, the conflict has already been decided, and not in the direction of religion as religion. The changeling passes for the original but something, one senses, is missing, something of the life of the original. It is living and dead, one of the living dead, one fears a coincidence of opposites not quite the same as the original religious representation of being beyond death.

I would say that Hegel's discussion of immortality reveals the more general tension, already suggested, between existential particularity and logicist universality. Hegel's bias towards humanity's cognitive immortality enacts the overall displacement: from will as particular to cognition as universal; from personal perpetuation to the general immortality of humanity as such. The *this as this*, the particularity said to be at the source of evil, is only a subordinate moment of the speculative logos of a whole. Even the existential cleavage and anguish is transposed to humanity in terms of *historical totalities*. The fuller significance of this transposition can be seen when Hegel discusses knowledge, estrangement and evil (*LPR*, 446 ff.). Hegel's *Begriff* parades as no merely abstract generality; as ontological, it is said to be concretized in world history. It claims to sublimate the difference of the existential and the logicist, undermining their tension by transcending it. Hegel speaks of the cleavage in terms of *inwardness*, as well as its *being known*, and the existential resonance is unmistakable: 'Anguish is present only when one is in opposition to what ought to be, to an affirmative' (*LPR*, 447). When Hegel speaks of *Schmerz*, we are in the field of grief and sorrow, of affliction and distress, but, no sooner said than done, a dialectical-speculative displacement takes over with the world historical. World history turns us from inwardness to redeem the promise of spirit in terms of a historicist teleology of the whole. This offers the most total teleology of evil itself. World history elevates the existential particular to universality, while rendering the universal temporally immanent. There seems no redemption of evil outside of it or beyond it.

It is not surprising that we now find Hegel detailing a series of historical gradations of inwardization, as well as attending to how different epochs understand the

cleavage. While the theme seems existentially 'subjective', the content is historically 'objective'. Once again Hegel follows the trinitarian pattern from unity to difference to mediated unity. The Oriental world lacks adequate differentiation. Interpolated query: on Hegel's terms, is there no evil or good in the Oriental world? Without proper difference, are 'Oriental' humans just innocent or dreaming animals? Is this not what Hegel says 'paradise' means – an animal garden (*Tiergarten*; LPR, 442). But this is *prior* to the ethical proper? Were the 'Orientals' non-ethical animals?

The Parsee religion brings difference but defines the cleavage *externally* in terms of a clash of good and evil principles.⁹ The doubleness in Persian religion yields to an immanent rupture. Hegel speaks of *Entzweiung*, not *Entfremdung*,¹⁰ his more customary word for 'alienation'. *Entzweiung* (Zwei, two, a double) suggests a process of doubling. 'En-doubling' might be an attempted English equivalent. The oneness of inwardness is doubled in emerging from innocent immediacy; just as the One doubles itself into universality and particularity, in the original *Ur-teil*. Hegel notes two forms of the human en-doubling: one in relation to God; the other in relation to the world. The first is the absolute en-doubling or cleavage, the most radical of all, and with the greatest depth. It generates infinite anguish concerning oneself. Hegel puts it: 'anguish is precisely the element of negativity in the affirmative, meaning that within itself the affirmative is self-contradictory and wounded.'¹¹ Hegel links this to consciousness of the one God as a pure spiritual God. The second *Entzweiung* or en-doubling of evil relative to the world brings us back onto the terrain of the unhappy consciousness. The world seems unable to satisfy the longing of the human spirit, the immanent demand that the world be rational, and presses humanity back into *itself*. Hegel mentions the Jewish people with their developed sense of the one God which makes them dissatisfied with natural being. He then turns to the universal unhappiness of the Roman world where humanity is driven back into itself, such as we find in the formal inwardness of Stoicism and the negativity of Scepticism. Here the self is supposed to find itself at home with itself. In fact 'here antithesis is at its height, and both sides embrace the antithesis in its most complete universality – in the universal itself – and in its innermost essence, its greatest depth' (LPR, 450). The sequence of historical instantiations of the cleavage shows these to be dialectically related to each other, at the epochal level, and world history brings humanity to radical cleavage.¹²

While the cleavage is concentrated in *one particular figure* in the *Phenomenology* (as we saw in earlier discussion of the unhappy consciousness), in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* it is distributed more *universally* in different historical epochs. Now we come across the center of evil and anguish, of humiliated finitude and agonizing longing for salvation in a 'beyond' (LPR, 449–52). At this point in the *Phenomenology* the theme of the death of God appears; in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the discussion is of Jesus Christ and the reconciliation of the human being and God. The concept dictates it so: absolute *Entzweiung* or endoubling, a necessitated moment of anguish in itself, is nevertheless a moment in transition, indeed at its deepest, the moment of *reversal*. The opposition turns into its opposite at the extreme, turns into absolute reconciliation. En-doubling is the re-doubling of the One, speculatively necessary for the One's absolute self-mediation or at-onement. The rupture of evil is penultimate to the absolute good, speculatively conceived as the achieved coincidence of man and God. When Hegel speaks of the

death of God, this is the death of the transcendent beyond. Christ embodies the reconciliation in history. Evil has no malign otherness to which this reconciliation is unequal. In annulling the difference of the human and divine, there is nothing transcendent to the reconciliation brought forth.

Notice how in the case of Jesus we find again the tension between particularity and universality: Jesus a unique I; Jesus a representative of the divine process which is eternal, universal, applicable to humanity as such, not just this human.¹³ The unique I must be *Aufgehoben* by the philosophical *Begriff*; otherwise it is a mere contingency. Notice the strategy again: first insist on the unique I, then undercut that insistence, by insisting more ultimately on the universal. What if singularity, or the singularity of happening, is of the essence with evil and reconciliation, singularity that cannot be objectively, or speculatively universalized? Is speculative universality the duplicitous double of the objective universal, seeming to address the intimacy of the singular, but in fact setting it finally at naught? Do we need a different universal, neither speculative nor objective, to deal with this? Will Hegel's notion of community do? I will come back to this.

Hegel says that the death of God is the death of death. It is a religious *Vorstellung* of greatest moment in showing the absolute reversal effecting evil and good. The true reconciliation, Hegel will say, shows the power of spirit to set the evil at naught. The hand that inflicts the wound is also the hand that heals the wound, he says; spirit can undo what spirit itself has done; the negative can negate itself and so be affirmative.¹⁴ He also says that *thought and only thought* is the principle of restoration. What kind of thought? Is it thought simply thinking *itself*? What of the thought of an *other* beyond self-thinking thought in genuine forgiveness and restoration? Is all Hegelian forgiveness only self-forgiving? If the hand that wounds is the same hand that heals, is the ultimate at-onement the speculative *self-forgiving* of the absolute? Are there doubles beyond Hegel's speculative-dialectical One, such as forgiveness of the other in the between: not only one's own forgiving but one's *being forgiven* by an agapeic other? 'Spirit heals the wound without leaving any scar.' Surely, one might ask, is the scar not just the mark of a finitude that cannot heal itself? But if it is supposed to be the self-cancelling scar of infinite spirit, necessarily self-scarring and necessarily self-healing, what meaning could redemption, be it divine or human, have then? Would the wound not be the simulation of evil and hence the healing be the counterfeit of redemption?

Consider: the hand that wounds is the hand that heals. But then it is always the *same hand*. Consider then: if my hand wounds the relation to God, is it *my* hand that heals the wound? If so I redeem myself. When need then have I of God? You say, no, no: we must think of *God* as forgiving. But if it is God's hand that heals, it is God's hand that *wounds*, since the 'two' hands are one and the same. But *what* then does God's hand wound? God's relation to humanity? Why must God wound *that* relation? Or God's relation to Godself? Then it is God's *hand* that heals God, but why does God have to wound God? What could such a self-mutilating God be? The self-wounding God would be the same as the self-healing God. But what could one make of the self-forgiveness of this self-mutilating God? And if Hegel is right that it is a matter of *knowing*, God seems to have to *fool himself* in order to make himself wise. What kind of stupid God is this? What kind of evil God is this, if evil

is necessary for God (to be God)? What good is such a 'God'? What good could you expect from such a 'God'?

These are questions Hegel's admirers do not put to him. A pity. They may even dismiss them in exasperation. So much the worse for them. And another question: when we speak of forgiveness do we ever *explain* anything? Is it not more a matter of a certain kind of *acknowledgment* – an acknowledgment of the happening of healing generosity: the forgiving other gives me back myself again – and then for sure the hand that heals is *not* the hand that wounds. Does Hegelian self-forgiveness, be it attributed to God or man, and in the light of self-thinking thought, squint at this redeeming generosity of the other? Is this happening of forgiveness not agapeic?

But suppose we grant that Hegel is concerned with something like the providential presence of God in history. One would have to say that he undercuts the distinction Augustine makes between the City of God and the City of Man: undercuts, just by claiming to sublimate it speculatively. This issue can be put also on the more intimate level in relation to the will divided against itself, a concern of both Augustine and Hegel. Manicheanism was the form of Parsee dualism that dominated the younger Augustine whose turn to Platonism and Christianity enabled an understanding of evil in terms of inwardness and will, and not in terms of an external dualistic opposition of cosmic powers. Such an external dualism distorts the ontological and existential intimacy of good and evil in the human being. Yet, recalling St. Paul, the will is inwardly at odds with itself: self-divided inwardness cannot do the good it wills because the same will that wills the good also wills the evil. Hegel, I think, effects something like a speculative displacement of this intimacy of the self-divided will onto world history, even while granting some importance to the intimacy. Augustine's sense of Providence by no means entails that world history is the ultimate tribunal. *Die Weltgeschichte* is not *das Weltgericht*. Providence in history is not denied but the Cities of God and Man intermingle without becoming identical, and in a manner we can never entirely comprehend, for the last secret of this intermingling or intermediation will not surrender to the importunate knocking of speculative logic. There is a temporal intermingling of the Cities of God and Man, and this is an historical en-doubling, but in history itself this en-doubling will never be reduced to the final sway of a singular realm. There is an intimacy of being, whether in being evil or being good, which, in relation to the City of God, is *other* to world history and which remains always other to the terms of the immanent City of Man. The terms of the first are intimated in the beatitudes of what I call agapeic service, of the second in the excellences and idolatries of erotic sovereignty. These second terms do not, cannot comprehend the first, whose secret lies deep in the intimate communication between divine transcendence as other and humans. This intimate communication often remains *incognito* on the stage of world history, its servants invisible to the erotic sovereigns.

Hegel's historicist teleology of evil sees world history as bringing together in a dialectical unity the City of God and the City of Man. Augustine rejects such a final unity in *world history* itself. Likewise, the struggle of the Cities *within* the *inner* en-doubling of the ethical self will always have a constitutive dimension of irreducible inwardness that will not necessarily appear on the public stage of world history, or be commensurate with what happens there. Evil relates to what I call the idiocy of the monstrous. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the irreducible constitutive inwardness

of the religious relation reiterates Augustine in this regard. Augustine and Kierkegaard are Christian sons of pagan Plato: time and eternity retain an otherness to each other, show a doubleness irreducible to unity, even one as complexly qualified as Hegel's trinitarian holism. Neither denies a communication between eternity and time, but the terms in which this is understood cannot be those of Hegel's speculative dialectic.¹⁵

Hegel's teleological vision is often said to resemble the famous *felix culpa*: a transgression which makes possible a subsequent good greater than the first condition before transgression. Augustine would bridle at the imputation of logical necessity. Freedom for evil witnesses a more intractable mystery. And if we make evil dialectically necessary to the logic of the divine life, is not God inculpated, and where then is the absolute goodness? Augustine has a different understanding of creation: God is good; His creation, though finite, is intrinsically good; indeed all being, whether finite or infinite, is good; evil is a willed defection from the good of being, a nihilation 'produced' by the defecting will. This nihilating defection or de-effecting, a 'producing' that does not produce, or 'produces' nothing, or tries even to undo creation, suggests a kind of negative otherness that resists complete logical articulation or determinability. For Hegel, by contrast, every otherness, even as negative, is incorporated into the speculative-dialectical process of determination. Evil finally is no radical enigma, but a necessary moment of the divine life itself.

You might ask: does not Augustine's God take evil upon itself in the redemption effected by Christ's death, itself witness to the *felix culpa*? But is there not a difference between 'taking' evil on oneself thus and evil as an essential and necessary moment of the divine life? What does 'taking on' mean here? If the 'taking on' of mortality is agapeic, the saving 'equalization' between the infinite and the finite retains the otherness of God as the absolutely superior power. It retains the absolute asymmetry between God and the finite creature, just in God's agapeic 'equalization' with the finite. Indeed, it is hard to see how one 'takes on' evil in Hegel's view, given that in any case evil is a dialectical necessity. Monstrous evil lies like an undigested stone in the belly of the Hegelian whole – undigested just because it is thus speculatively digested.

There is a certain *gratuitousness*, in a negative sense, about the root of evil as a kind of 'motiveless malignity', as there is a gratuitousness in an affirmative sense about the redeeming act that forgives it, 'sets it at nought'.¹⁶ From the standpoint of Hegelian logic, there is nothing essential that is finally gratuitous, since finally everything finds its necessary place within the absolute process as dialectically self-mediating. No doubt, Hegel would claim that any such gratuitousness fixes on the element of contingency in every religious representation. We fail to take the final philosophical step by which the representation is *aufgehoben* into the concept, and the element of contingency and gratuitousness transcended. But is not this just the issue at stake? What if there are absolute gratuities, for instance, the very happening of finite being itself? Does not creation refer us to this? How does, how can philosophy 'overcome' this? Would not such a project strike one as speculative folly? Would it blind one to the contingency of the happening of finite being, and the deeply perplexing hatred of being as good that lies at the heart of evil? Does not evil remind us of a negative asymmetry: we expect some intelligibility, or good, but its nihilation is 'there' instead. Or: it is not 'there', for there is nothing univocally

determinable that one could conceptually appropriate. If agapeic good communicates a surplus love, evil can 'show' a kind of surplus hatred that cannot be absolutely determined, for there is 'nothing' there.

What if the doubling of the will rather reflects the irreducibility of otherness between the human and the divine, requiring more than a holistic self-mediation but a (metaxological) intermediation between us and what is beyond? What the doubled will shows is the struggle against just the temptation to monistic self-mediation, and the truer opening to the communication of the divine other. The will at war with itself fights, or is welcomed beyond, the closure of its own self-mediation completely in itself.

And what are we to make of the suggestion that the will at war with itself is *God's 'will'*, as we suspect about Hegel's God? Hegel's God redeems God's own evil in the absolute self-mediating whole.¹⁷ Then *this (Hegelian) redemption mimics the evil will*, whose closure on itself is also a closing down of a truly released intermediation with the other. Hegel sometimes locates evil in the self-closure of the particular subject, but he also locates it in the immanences of his inclusive trinitarian One, whose teleology, remember, is finally also closure on itself in completed self-mediation. Would not such self-closure, whether attributed to the finite particular or the inclusive trinitarian One, be a *counterfeiting of the between*, indeed a refusal of the metaxological community of being and the open intermediation with the other it requires? Is it not a counterfeit double of the God of the between?

The evil will expresses the absolutization of a closed self-mediation: the finite particular may set itself in hostile opposition to all otherness, and here we recognize some truth, for humans can set themselves against all otherness. But what then of the completed self-mediation of *the divine*, returned to itself? There is nothing beyond it, and evil is also within it. Why then should we call it good rather than evil? Why should not Schopenhauer be more nearly in the right, when the ultimate will is an evil will rather than a good will? Hegel might well say this makes no sense. But the goodness of the ultimate is not established, nor explained by speculative logic. Hegel thinks at a level of spiritual immaturity by comparison with the great perplexity of Augustine about the goodness of God and the mystery of iniquity. Bewitched by his own reiterations of the rhythm of his speculative logic, these hyperbolic perplexities slip by him. The community of the divine as agapeic, and the evil refusal of the community of being as let be by that agape, do not register in his system.

Theodicy is often presented as the justification of God by knowledge that puts evil in its place. Hegel fits this. What if there were a theodicy more concerned with ultimate trust: not speculative knowing, but trust that guards us from the ultimate despair in the good, and that is not a knowing of which we are masters, nor a matter of superior self-determination? This absolute trust would be a graced openness, in the cursed heart of darkest evil. If redemption for Hegel is clearly a matter of coming to knowledge, how is this knowledge redeeming? Once again does not Hegel's theodicy seem more a justification of evil than of God? Is Hegel then of the party of Satan, as Blake said of Milton? And is knowing this 'God', knowing something monstrous and mad and evil in its very Odyssey to redeem itself?

If God has to redeem himself, what kind of God can that be for us human beings in the middle? We might perhaps pity that God, or despise it for its necessity to have to enact itself as evil in history. The Hegelian sage who bows the knee here would be a fool – without the idiot wisdom of religious love. If this is a speculative sanctification of a rational God whom one cannot worship, or praise or love, one has to wonder if the rationality so deified is itself a dissimulated hatred of worship and love, and also of the different God who is truly praised there?

The asymmetries of Eternity and Time and the Counterfeit Whole

It is important to grant that the intimacy of God and creation is not obviated by their qualitative difference. Kierkegaard speaks of Christianity and the paradox that the eternal entered into time. While Hegel seems to grant the same, the meaning he gives to this entry is very different. Kierkegaard wants to bring his reader face to face with this paradox by a variety of wily strategies – aesthetic, ethical, religious – strategies that bring the individual to the consciousness of guilt beyond aesthetic or ethical alleviation. The mystery of iniquity, hence defined as transfinite guilt and sin, points beyond to paradox. I am not entirely endorsing Kierkegaard, since at times, especially in some later remarks, he shows traces of Nietzsche's caricature of Christianity as a kind of gruesome ethical-religious torture. But there is no doubt Kierkegaard is correct about the transfinite nature of the issue, and hence its hyper-problematic character. Evil is in the dimension of the hyperbolic, and cannot be 'solved' or absolved in human terms alone. We are talking about something for which words like 'salvation' seem the truer. Should we speak of the paradox as the absurd? Hegel would reject this as intended, though no doubt, for Hegel, there is something paradoxical, even absurd about the consummate religion from the standpoint of *Verstand*: but the absurdity turns out to be absolute reason itself, if we ascend to speculative *Vernunft*.

Are there not *asymmetries* here to be noted, against Hegel's logic of mutual determination in inclusive self-determination. Ask: how can the unoriginate come into time? Can the unborn be born? I have suggested that creation is not the unoriginated origin originating itself in time: it is the bringing to be of time, and as other to the origin, and as released into the promise of its own plurivocalized becoming. The otherness of this difference is not an indifference, given the agape of the origin, but the promise of community across difference. The origin, as overdeterminate is 'over' and 'above', hence 'absent' if we determinate it as a being within creation. But as 'absent' it is 'present', as creator, as absolute possibilizing power, of what is given to be. This mixture of 'absence' and 'presence' constitutes the finite between as ambiguous – as equivocal between its ultimate source and its own being for itself. Humans participate in, but also wake up to, this equivocal condition. Hence this 'absence/presence' can be the occasion of *multiple* responses: 'absence' can be accentuated, and yet the 'absent' origin loved hyperbolically; but then 'presence' can be denigrated, and the world become a despised god-forsaken vale of tears; or 'presence' can be accentuated totalistically, and 'absence', as the negative sign of transcendence, denigrated, and then the world looks something like a pantheistic totality which, as god-saturated, is also god-forsaken, since the

God beyond the whole, the origin as other, has been excluded from the picture. If I am not mistaken, Hegel takes this last way, with suitable qualification, and in response to the dualistic god-forsakenness.

Of course, words like 'absence' and 'presence' do not quite describe God's transcendence and immanence, for they are too tied to determinate beings. No finite categories could be absolutely true to God. We 'see' more in the hyperboles of finitude, such as the transfinite 'presence' that love can communicate. There is also possible a dwelling in the equivocal between that has finesse for the 'absence/presence': 'absence' not totally univocal, 'presence' neither totally univocal or speculative; in-between, where the ambiguous 'absence' of God is less than the world as god-forsaken, and more than the entirely immanent 'presence' suggested by the pantheistic totality. But this ambiguous between, just as fluid, and our relation to it, and the origin, is such that we are always inclined to recreate it, reconfigure it in the terms of our own univocalizing, or self-determining. We refuse to be patient to the equivocity, and crystallize the ambiguous communication in a determinate direction, especially remaking the doubleness of the plurivocal ambiguity in terms of cruder dualistic doubles. Such dualistic doubles define God and world as hostile others; and then to have God, we must negate the world; alternatively to preserve the world, we must deny God. Or humans become hostile to the hostile otherness of God or world, reconfiguring it in a total historical process of humanized self-determination. These latter responses actually entrench the equivocity in a more radically sightless way. They are the human reconstructions that have failed in the necessary finesse. This is not just an aesthetic or speculative matter. It has to do with ethics, as defined by the essential forms of value. And it is religious also, in reshaping the relation of the human and divine such that the form that is crystallized from the fluid ambiguity corrupts the relation, or betrays the promise of the relation.

This last corruption or betrayal can be developed to such an extremity that the promise of this relation is entirely refused. And then we find ourselves in a world we have remade and there is no solution to the 'problem' of evil we ourselves are. For we are the hyperbolic enigma of the free creature that has refused what gives it to be, what gives even the 'to be' of its free radical refusal, that is, God as the agapeic origin. If there is a 'solution', it is 'salvation' but this would be the absolving of the false world and its re-creation, the re-creation of its promise. But this would mean a second coming to be, beyond the first evil. What would this be?

Christianity claims that the birth of Jesus Christ as the Son of God is this second coming to be: redemption. But this is now not the coming to be of creating; but the coming to be of God in creation itself: the unborn is born as a helpless infant, and grows as a human and endures the temptations and finally passion and death of the mortal creature. This 'being born' is called the incarnation. It is the immanent transformation of the world, the promise of its being re-born, its being re-created. But the mystery remains of the unoriginated entering into the intimacy of the originated: the unborn into the intimacy of the born; what has not come to be, but is eternal, coming to be in what, as created, is defined by coming to be, and its own becoming.¹⁸

Hegel thinks this is made intelligible by his speculative logic. I think that the absolutely astonishing claim here made is merely tamed. For the claim is either mad or divine madness, and Hegel's speculative reason is not the intimate discerning

mindfulness that allows one to tell the difference. Kierkegaard regards it as an absurd paradox beyond all reason, beyond all nature, beyond all human nature. The homogeneities of the first are perhaps echoed by the heterogeneities of the second: absolute unity, absolute difference. Kierkegaard has it more nearly right to the extent that this happening as happening exceeds the determination of human reason, but its mystery is not just absurd, since everything about our condition points towards a solution that is beyond solution, since the problem is beyond being a problem. If we put the question, we as questing cannot ourselves be the answer – the answer is other. Do we not need a third way that is neither Hegelian homogeneity, nor Kierkegaardian heterogeneity? In his obsessive urgency to break outside and beyond the circle of the pantheistic totality, Kierkegaard does so in terms that risk reproducing the complementary dualism, in which the temptation to reduce the plurivocal equivocity of the finite between is not always avoided, and there are too many traces of hostility, in the name of the God beyond the whole, to the fallen world, and to forsaken counterfeits of religion that present themselves in modern society as the progressive completion of the religious itself.

Even here, the equivocity does not vanish. For there is always the danger of a love of God that is too mingled with a hatred of the world, and which, while ostensibly acting as an escort to the Prince of Peace, will have little to do with peace but would bring the sword of spirit so violently to bear on the evils of immanence that we fear the silent forbearance of the agapeic origin has been lost, and all in the name of God. A religious heart of stone may preach in the name of the heart of love. Kierkegaard's *polemos* against the closure of panentheistic Hegelianism means that he must break down, break through into an outside, where the same momentum of urgent desire to escape speculative reason can form itself in the posture of dualistic opposition. The finesse Kierkegaard shows as a dialectician sometimes deserts him when the ethos of *polemos* reasserts itself and, out of the discerning of the equivocal, postures of a too violent dualistic opposition emerge.¹⁹

And Hegel? Even granting the 'being born' of God in time, does this necessitate the totalizing of the self-becoming of God in time, into the complete closure of immanence at home with itself? Surely not. Surely the otherness of the origin as 'being born' in time does not cancel the otherness? And why should the language of 'self-becoming', even speculative self-becoming, be used for this 'being born'? Is not this already to reduce the hyperbolic overdeterminacy to the determinate, or self-determining dimensions of what has already being given to be, and in this, actually making it impossible even to acknowledge the hyperbolic difference suggested by this happening of incarnation. The hiddenness of this to determinate cognition, indeed to self-determinate knowing is not something truly granted by Hegel's way of thinking. Kierkegaard in affirming the hiddenness tends to forget that, after all, there is a *communication* here, despite all indirections, and hence there is more than hiddenness. In his asserted difference to Hegel, Kierkegaard is sometimes quite close to him from whom he would differ, if only by negative relation. The serpent seems, at times, to have won with Kierkegaard, also won its way with the world, won with the falsification of Christianity with Christendom. Hegel endorses the victory; Kierkegaard says the victory plays false, but the victory seems to stand relative to the 'world'. His 'redemption' of the world seems to leave it unredeemed – a redemption *from* the world – and so, on occasion he muses, the

funeral becomes the most joyous occasion (see, for example, Kierkegaard, 1965, 73–4, 113, 114–15).

Redemption bears on the asymmetry of good in the dimension of the hyperbolic. Evil and forgiveness bear on our asymmetrical relation to God: if God forgives evil, there is a surplus otherness in a negative sense to the evil that holds one in bondage, and a surplus otherness in an affirmative sense to the good that releases from that bondage. It is because of this asymmetrical relation that the 'problem' of evil is not a problem that has a determinate solution but a negative overdeterminacy: the *mysterium iniquitatis* that is in the dimension of the hyperbolic, and without solution, and that can only be 'solved' by being 'absolved', that is, in the offer that saves. A mystery calls to salvation, not system: this is not just a cognition, be it determinate or self-determining, but a metanoia of one's whole being.

The different asymmetries here must be connected with a mindfulness of the agape of the divine. These are what we might call the *asymmetries of the full*. Recall from the previous chapter my suggestions about the relation *between* trinity and finite creation, agapeically understood. This relation could not be the *self-creation* of the surplus good – this self-creation would have no meaning here. Rather this is where *creatio ex nihilo* says something different: from the infinite fullness to the finite fullness, recognized as such by the origin, or God beyond the whole, in the words 'It is good, it is very good.' This is the surplus good of creation. And what would evil be here? *Evil would be the effect of a false holistic logic*. What is created asserts itself as God and shows itself thus as falling into the temptation to become God's counterfeit double. Rather than the Anaximandrian holism where evil is the violence of the particular on the 'whole' as it tears itself free from it, *evil has to do with the 'creation' of counterfeit wholes*. A finite whole claims to be the God beyond the whole, by making itself the whole, and so it falls into being a counterfeit double.

When this happens, the 'nothing' also appears differently within the false whole. Before, it marked the difference of the finite creation and the God beyond creation as a finite whole; now, the freedom to be other to God, the first gift of freedom, takes to itself the 'no', and becomes the power of negation. Result: a love mixing lack and fullness follows, and an erotic self-becoming in the fall into the equivocality of good and evil is tempted to totalize itself as the truth of the whole. Within that counterfeit whole, or double of God, our desire is always marked by that mixed condition, mixing lack and fullness, having wounded its own finite fullness in relation to God by asserting itself as more than finite. In my view, Hegel's understanding of being, of nothing, of love takes its sights from an incomplete understanding of this mixed, equivocal condition, and the erotic self-becoming that seems to move dialectically from lack to completion. Stressed is the will to be whole out of the initial lack; not the transcending that communicates from full to full to full. In this way of thinking the difference of God and creation must be blurred, if not eventually to disappear. Indeed also the asymmetries between God and finitude must be distorted. And then the logic of erotic self-becoming (even if it is called an eternal self-becoming) defines the trinity, and then creation, and then the process of world history. But all of this does not break free of the false double of God that emerges with the will to be the whole. Hegel's counterfeiting affects everything. God is absent in being thus present.

Calling to mind some earlier remarks about trinity, I now conclude with a brief summary of some of the crucial asymmetries of the full. *Within the Godself as trinitarian*, one might think of the communication of symmetrical overfullness, in the hyperbolic dimension of the overdeterminate good. *Between God and creation*, one might speak of an asymmetry between eternal, unoriginated overfullness and finite, originated fullness. *Within creation*, one might speak of a mix of symmetrical and asymmetrical fullness. *Between creation and divine transcendence*, one might speak of an asymmetry in the self-transcending (T2) from creation *towards* transcendence itself (T3). But we might conceive of the *communication from* divine transcendence (T3) to creation as both showing asymmetrical goodness in the dimension of the hyperbolic *and* a making symmetrical but in an agapeic sense: God makes himself immanent for the creature. But this last 'making symmetrical' is agapeic giving from overfullness, which is not diminished by making itself proportionate to the mortal creature and its passion of being ('becoming man'). The overfullness is as nothing for the mortal creature to be as good. The truth of this last immanent 'symmetry' is just transcendent 'asymmetry', if God is agapeic rather than erotic: God the agapeic servant, not the erotic sovereign. Nothing 'immanent' in finitude, through itself alone, could effect this immanent 'symmetry' of the transcendent 'asymmetry'. The asymmetry of the mystery of divine overfullness remains, even when it communicates itself absolutely to the finite creature in participating in the *passio essendi* of the mortal man, even unto death itself. This is a divine kenosis quite other to Hegel's holistic 'God'.

Notes

- 1 'But the concept of eternity must not be grasped negatively as abstraction from time, as existing, as it were, outside time' (*Enz*, § 258). The erotic absolute seems to speak to 'becoming' rather than 'coming to be'.
- 2 See *LPR*, 117, on God as what is enclosed in itself (*das in sich Verschlussene*) or in absolute unity with itself.
- 3 On this and the erotic origin, see Desmond (1997). There is a passage in *Twilight of the Idol*, ('Skirmishes of an Untimely Man', § 49, titled, Goethe) where Nietzsche says that the particular is loathsome – only in the whole is all redeemed, and to be affirmed. This is Nietzsche's way of speaking about Dionysian affirmation, of *amor fati*.
- 4 In the 1831 Lectures, Hegel speaks of epochs of spirit – a theme connected explicitly by some commentators with Joachim of Fiore (for example, see de Lubac (1979), Clarke Butler in Kolb (1992), O'Regan (1994), Magee (2000)).
- 5 Hegel's account lies, I think (Desmond, 1992) between the intimacy of existential pathos and the neutralizing necessity of objective world history, but his final stress must be on the second, since overall the logical necessity of the concept seems to supersede the particularity of evil as an excessively perplexing happening. The hand that wounds is the hand that heals, Hegel says of *Geist*. Is the Hegelian hand that gives particularity also the Hegelian hand that takes it away? Which Hegelian hand is the one that heals and the one that wounds? Which offends, which reconciles? Are they always the same hand? What hand does the other play in all this? Must we live with *both* hands? If so, is there a doubleness in Hegel, and is it essential to dialectical thought? What then is the status of such an ineradicable doubleness? In that ineradicable doubleness does some other otherness, an other than dialectical otherness, always stay

open, and resist dialectical comprehension? Does it wait for thought at the heart of dialectic, patiently ready to confound its claims to complete comprehension? Can speculative dialectic comprehend one of the hands: the this as this of evil in the existential intimacy of its inwardness; the idiocy of evil, the idiocy of the monstrous, in the Greek sense of *idios*, its otherness to the public universal? Can Hegel's saving speculative dialectic, restore to life a hand withered to a stump by its own deforming iniquity?

- 6 Also labor, the significance of which occupied Hegel in other places, for instance, the *Phenomenology* and the *System of Ethical Life*. We must work to make ourselves what we implicitly are as spirit – work 'spiritualizes' humanity.
- 7 Hegel puts it thus (*LPR*, 441): 'The condition of evil directly presupposes the relation of actuality to the concept; this simply posits the contradiction between implicit being or the concept and singularity, the contrast between good and evil...'
- 8 See *LPR* where there are two discussions of nature and the fall, and these are not entirely consistent. We are here looking at the second discussion, connected with Christianity. But there is a first discussion in connection with 'natural religion' (*LPR*, 209 ff.). Hegel here, one might say, thrashes philosophies of 'origin'. There is no paradise at all; there is the animal garden, where men are savage in a nature more evil than good. One finds Gnostic traces in the first as well as the second discussion in regard to Biblical religion, and especially Christianity: the serpent is right (*LPR*, 217). Nature here seems more evil than good. Certainly there is no hyperbolic 'It is good, it is very good.' The creator looks more like a heteronomous 'God', jealous, keeping divinity from primal man (see *LPR*, 445). Is the Jewish God the false god who keeps divinity from humans? Transgression seems needed to overcome this alien 'God'. Who then is God the 'creator' as the self-alienating God? Is this the heteronomous father? In what sense is this father the alien god? In Hegel's thought, we need to say 'no' in order to be free. The primal release of the ontological 'yes' of 'It is good' is blanked out in the Hegelian 'no'. Whether in the first discussion of the story of the fall in terms of natural religion, or the second in terms of revealed religion and the second moment of the trinity, creation is connected with evil. Twice is blanked out the primal nature of the 'It is good' of the origin. But if the creation is so intimately connected with evil, what then are we to think of the origin?
- 9 But see earlier (*LPR*, 298–9) when he connected the good in Persian religion to self-determination
- 10 Remember that the word Hegel used in his first philosophical publication, the *Differenzschrift*, to describe the condition out of which philosophy itself arises is none other than *Entzweiung*! (Hegel, 1977, *Difference*, 89). Philosophy itself arises in the middle from an 'en-doubling', from an inwardizing, an *Erinnerung* of a doubling.
- 11 *LPR*, 449: 'And thus the contradiction remains, no matter how one twists oneself about ... my lack of correspondence to my essence and to the absolute remains; and from one side or the other I know myself always as what ought not to be.'
- 12 This is implied by Stoicism and Scepticism, but a reader even cursorily familiar with the *Phenomenology* will detect a markedly similar unfolding in the lectures on religion. A crucial turning point occurs just here in the *Phenomenology* in consciousness' efforts to be at home with itself in its other: antithesis is developed to its most radical antagonism. The violent antithesis of master and slave is internalized in the divided consciousness of the Stoic and Sceptic and reaches its most extreme form in the Unhappy Consciousness.
- 13 Hegelian doubleness in his ambivalence: Jesus is said to be irreducibly singular; his singularity is not a singularity in general. Yet this singularity is identified with sensuous immediacy, for Hegel a necessary moment in the appearance of the absolute. Some

human beings have come in history to believe that irreducible singularity is ingredient in the divine life, as in the Christian stress on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. In effect Hegel converts this religious belief into a historical mode of self-recognition by the *Weltgeist*, wherein sensuous immediacy is at last grasped as a dialectically necessary moment of the appearance of the absolute, or the self-particularization of the concept; and this despite Hegel saying that the 'God-man' is a 'monstrous compound' that directly contradicts representation and understanding (*Verstand*) – it does not impair ultimate unity (*LPR*, 457–8). On the other hand, despite this ambiguous emphasis on singularity, Hegel later will more explicitly bring out what is here veiled. And so in Hegel's third moment of the Holy Spirit/community, the singularity of Jesus as an historical *this* is done away with, and the universal holds undisputed sway again. See, Yerkes (1983), Beito (1983), Hodgson (1987), more fully on the complexities of Hegel's Christology.

- 14 Thus Hegel puts it in the *Zusatz* to § 24 on the Fall in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. Hegel also talks about the death of Jesus as a stripping away of the human element. I find something odd here. I would rather think of a divine *compassio essendi* that enters into radical intimacy with the *passio essendi* of the mortal human. Hegel does say God is involved in the exposure of the human to the negative (see *LPR*, 468–9), humanity as a *natural* existence. He says that 'the human is the immediately present God'. The stress, if I am not mistaken, is on the immanence of the negative within 'God', 'as a moment of the divine nature itself', as he puts it. The radical intimacy of the divine *compassio essendi*, as I mean it, is not *that* immanence.
- 15 Are there doubles that are not merely dualistic oppositions to be dialectically *Aufgehoben*? Not counterfeit doubles, for they recall us to senses of otherness (like the affirmative transcendence of God) that resist complete conceptual comprehension by us. Doubles that do not condemn us to the wretched alienation of Hegel's unhappy consciousness?
- 16 Desmond (2001b).
- 17 *LPR*, 126: 'It can in fact be conceded that the distinction of good and evil is sublated implicitly, that is, sublated in God as the sole true actuality. In God there is no evil. [However,] the distinction of good and evil exists only if God is also evil ... The distinction of good and evil is not present in this One, in this substance, for it first makes its entrance along with distinction in general. The distinction of good and evil makes its entrance together with the distinction of God from the world, in particular from human beings' Am I alone in feeling I am being juggled with here? If creation equals self-creation, and humans are god and if Hegel says God is not just substance, as Spinoza does, but spiritual unity, does not this make the evil even more intractable as *immanent* to God?
- 18 See some remarks Desmond (2001b) relative to God as the *compassio essendi*.
- 19 This is more evident in the later *Journal* entries than in most of the published works. These published works, in a sense, are strategic, hence masks, and one wonders if the *Journal* entries show more directly the traces of aggression and violence hidden in the more insinuating aesthetic form of the [pseudonymous] works: for example, he seems to see marriage in a very positive ethical light in one, while in the other, his contempt for families with their broods of children, comes out, and women as humiliating men as spirit. His melancholy as 'Christian' prides itself on being even more extreme than Schopenhauer's – though this too is applauded. See, for example, Kierkegaard (1965), 68–70, 77–9.

Chapter 7

God, Spirit and the Counterfeits of Religious Community

Spirit: the Absolute at its Height in Immanent Community

We must now consider the culmination of Hegel's trinitarian speculation in his doctrine of spirit, where we meet again the logic of holistic immanence, our concern throughout. Hegel spoke of spirit or *Geist* as the highest definition of the absolute: *Das Absolute ist der Geist; dies ist die höchste Definition des Absoluten* (Enz, § 384). At the end of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* of 1827 (473) he speaks of religious community as 'the existing spirit, the spirit in its existence, God existing as community'. Our previous explorations of Hegel's inclusive self-relating trinity left us with the impression that his logic of holistic immanence lent itself to a certain speculative homogenization between, first, the divine life in itself, second, its self-becoming through nature and history, which more truly constitutes its full life, and, third, our elevation to the divine. I summarize these three points, in their bearing on religious community.

First, within the divine, there is a self-communication which includes relation to the other, and the spirit names the bond that holds the father and son into a unity: spirit is the third in which the second returns to the first, and the first returns to itself through the second. *Second*, in the relation between the divine and its temporal creation, spirit names that binding of plurality into an (historical) community of freedom, in which the life of the whole is at home with itself: God manifest in the community, communicating with itself through the members of the community as its own media, members through whom the spirit is communally mediated to itself. Spirit then names 'subject' but a communal subject, not any singular one.¹ History as a whole is the medium of its self-communication. The religious community, the ethical community is the culminating historical medium in which spirit mediates with itself. To fix on the singular subject as this particular self is to risk evil, as it is to risk the fetishizing of Jesus, as Hegel holds Christians do. It is the event of the Pentecost that is the decisive forthcoming of God as existing in his community. Spirit is again not a singular 'subject' for its self-mediation is communal rather than individual. But if Hegel has a view of God as immanent in community, as 'intersubjective', its logic is still one of holistic self-determination or self-mediation. *Third*, while the human elevation to God is effected by religion, indeed accomplished by Christianity, its full communication requires worldly communities of immanent, secular freedom. Hence religion as 'merely' a spiritual community requires its completion by *the state*, the earthly divinity (*irdisch Göttliches* – PR, § 272, Zus). Likewise, the religious elevation also requires its completion in the consummate

holistic immanence of *philosophy*, Hegel's own philosophy, as **thought absolutely** at home with itself. Only spirit witnesses to spirit, Hegel says, **and philosophy** finally is the absolute witness, as 'thinking is the absolute judge' (*LPR*, 488).²

I proceed thus. First, I will offer a brief summary of what Hegel says about spirit and community at the culmination of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1827). Second, I will backtrack to make sense of Hegel's version of religious community in light of sometimes recessive considerations, such as the Kantian template of the kingdom of ends. Third, I will say something about spirit in terms of its subjective, objective and absolute forms. Fourth, I will say something about the implications of holistic immanence for a 'post-religious' community, asking whether there is something essential missed in Hegel's view of community, especially with regard to the religious community of agapeic service.

The important questions again revolve around our concerns about transcendence. Is Hegel's understanding of community fully adequate to a robustly irreducible sense of the other? Does his understanding reflect too much the community of erotic sovereignty and not enough the community of agapeic service? Is Hegel's spirit too equivocal between the divine spirit and the human, and the attenuated, if not obliterated, transcendence of the divine? If so, does it lend itself to the anthropological reductions that were quickly to follow in the wake of Hegel himself? And were these reductions actually reflective of the ambiguity of Hegel's intentions in that the spirit is not fully self-mediating if it is confined to a religious community that defines itself as other to the modern state? Is not this to point to a 'post-religious' community, where 'post' means for Hegel a secular community of freedom, more fully free from the putative bewitchments of transcendence, hence more true to the project of holistic immanence? But in this eclipse or oblivion of transcendence as other to human community, has Hegel conjured up his own equivocal bewitchment which his left-wing followers reduce to a much cruder, hence more effective bewitchment, and revealing to those not bewitched that this God on earth is a pernicious idol? To wake from such bewitchments is not to deny the need for ethical-political institutions that intermediate human freedoms, **but** to recognize our need for more finessed discernment for the differences and porosities between religious and ethical-political communities.

Spirit as Accomplishing God and God Accomplished

We start at the end by recounting Hegel's discussion at the consummation of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Hegel has called philosophy the study of unity, but here in discussing the spirit, the emphasis is primarily on community. Spirit is God existing in and as the religious community. In the *Phenomenology*, there is also God as manifest in community, appearing first with the 'yea, yea' of forgiveness. Previously we asked if Hegel equivocates between one and more than one in his account of forgiveness. If forgiveness might be counterfeited in self-forgiveness, might religious community be counterfeited in the self-communication of Hegel's spirit? Initial indications suggest no, given Hegel's Pentecostal emphasis and his underscoring of the immanence of spirit after the death of God in Jesus. This death and resurrection is spiritualized by Hegel, since as a sacrificial death it

shows the 'eternal history, the eternal movement, which God himself is'. "'To sacrifice' means to sublate the natural, to sublate otherness" (*LPR*, 469). This death is the transition to glory, but it is within 'the eternal divine history' of Godself (*LPR*, 470). While the immediate origin of the religious community is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (*LPR*, 470), in order for human beings to become spirit, thus citizens of the kingdom of God, they must traverse themselves the process of the divine history of estrangement and reconciliation.

Human beings, Hegel asserts, need the certainty that reconciliation has been accomplished (*LPR*, 471), and so it is something that must be represented as having taken place on earth, in appearance (*LPR*, 472). Hegel offers us a repetition of the three moments of the trinity in God existing as community (*LPR*, 473). Any problem about the difference between the finite subject as over against the spirit or community is 'solved' for Hegel by the fact that God supposedly looked into the human heart, but in such a way that God

sees what is substantial, so that externality – otherness, finitude, and imperfection in general, or however else it may be defined – does no damage to the absolute unity; finitude is reduced to an inessential status, and is known as inessential. For in the idea, the otherness of the Son is a transitory, disappearing moment, not a true, essentially enduring, absolute moment. This is the concept of the community in general, the idea which, to this extent, is the process of the subject within and upon itself ... [*LPR*, 474]

One notes here, even in discussing community, how the logic of a putatively absolutely inclusive 'subject' keeps turning up, and otherness a mere transitory moment vanishing in the holistic immanence of spirit's self-mediation.

Hegel claims that the Church is this community as subsisting (*LPR*, 475). This is 'essentially a teaching church' (*LPR*, 476), with its doctrines and sacraments, in which the person unconsciously participates in the life of spirit. This is especially so for the child for whom, as only implicit spirit, the 'truth necessarily comes to humanity at first as authority' (*LPR*, 477). But if there is truth here it is not really truth in its proper form. The individual must know of the overcoming of evil, and the division of human and God, not as to be accomplished, but as already having been accomplished: evil has been conquered (*LPR*, 478–9). Hegel significantly says: 'The battle is now over, and the consciousness arises that there is no longer a struggle', such as there was in the Parsee religion, and still is in Kantianism. The subsistence of the community is completed by the sharing of the divine presence in communion. While Hegel offers three views of communion, he seems not to show his own hand strongly, beyond indicating that if all this begins with the external, this is transformed and indeed consumed, and we end with the 'presence of God' as 'utterly a spiritual presence' (*LPR*, 481).

In the third moment of the realization of the spirituality of the community, Hegel moves from the reconciliation of the heart, which is abstract in nature (*LPR*, 481), to a sense of the subject as of infinite value, and to the notion of freedom accompanying this that must seek its worldly realization (*LPR*, 482). The forms of that worldly reconciliation are three. The first roughly corresponds to the early Christian Church: this is spiritual in its withdrawal from the world, the 'monkish withdrawal [which] means that the heart is not concretely developed' (*LPR*, 482).

For Hegel the nature of spirit is to develop itself even unto worldliness. The second form appears to correspond to the medieval Church where religiosity and worldliness remain external, even though they do enter into relation; but in this relation the former is the dominant power seeking to prevail over the uncultured worldly sphere. This creates, for Hegel, a world of unfreedom and a general condition of servitude, in which humans are in a ruptured condition, even within reconciliation itself. In this appears 'the corruption of the church, the absolute contradiction of the spiritual within itself' (LPR, 483). The third form is when the contradiction is resolved in the ethical realm. Here is true freedom, not obedience to an external power, as with the evangelical vows of the monks: '[T]he ethical is an obedience in freedom ... Thus it is in the ethical realm that the reconciliation of religion with worldliness and actuality comes about and is accomplished' (LPR, 484). With this we are brought to post-Reformation modernity.

If these are stages of a *real* reconciliation, there is also an *ideal side* in religious consciousness itself. Here Hegel's primary concern is with the *contemporary* relation of religion and philosophy, and with indicating his own philosophizing as the true absolute immanence of spirit. In this turning to philosophy, if I am not mistaken, the more complete, the absolute immanence of the spirit is claimed. Inwardness knows itself as subsisting in itself with the reconciliation of spirit with itself; but the knowledge of being at home with self is precisely *thinking*: 'Thinking means reconciledness, being at home or at peace with oneself' (LPR, 484). Philosophy is at peace with itself. Philosophy is *the* peace. The battle is over.

If Hegel does claim that peace for thinking, it is remarkable that he still has to struggle. This is evident in the fact that he must critically address the Enlightenment as a rationalistic thinking directed against the idea of God. (How peaceful are polemical remarks, that is, words of war, against philosophical rivals?) Enlightenment rationalism is abstract identitarian thinking which is not truly concrete (LPR, 485). By contrast, there is another way which is an 'inward weaving of spirit within itself' (LPR, 486). Here we have to do with Pietism, but this runs the risk of subjectivistic vanity and hypocrisy. Hegel is not at peace with that either. These two opposites, Enlightenment and Pietism, define 'the formal culture of our time'. The third reconciling moment comes, fortunately, when subjectivity develops the truth from itself in accord with necessity, and when it does so, it is philosophy (LPR, 487). Enlightenment understanding and Pietism 'volatilize all content', and these two standpoints, the vanity of the understanding, and 'ingenuous religiosity' (489) are opposed to philosophy, alias Hegel's own thought. Hegel himself 'comes on the scene', as it were, resurrects himself, after the battles of Enlightenment and Pietism. Against the two volatilizing positions opposed to philosophy, Hegel has battled to exhibit the rational cognition of religion in his lectures (LPR, 489). This is, so to say, Hegel's saving knowing.

Of course, this saving knowing is not just Hegel's own, as he is quick to reassure us. *The concept* produces the truth; though it also knows the truth as not produced, as subsisting in and for itself (LPR, 487). How can it be both produced and not produced? Sometimes Hegel leaves us hanging. Philosophy knows the content and the forms of the development of the content of religion. If all of this is justified through the witness of spirit, nevertheless, the 'witness of spirit is *thought*' (LPR, 488; emphasis added): 'In the appearance of God, God determines himself. Sustained

by philosophy, religion receives its justification from thinking consciousness.' One might think God is the absolute judge, but no, 'thinking is the absolute judge' (LPR, 488). But here thinking is philosophy, hence philosophy is the absolute judge, and itself the highest reconciliation of spirit. Extraordinary claims are made for Hegel's saving knowing:

This reconciliation is philosophy. Philosophy is to this extent theology. It presents the reconciliation of God with himself, and with nature, showing that nature, otherness, is implicitly divine, and that the raising of itself to reconciliation is on the one hand what finite spirit implicitly is, while on the other hand it arrives at this reconciliation, or brings it forth, in world history. This reconciliation is the peace of God which does not 'surpass all reason,' but is rather the peace that *through* reason is first known and thought and is recognized as what is true. [LPR, 489]

The holistic immanence of spirit is consummated in the Hegelian thinking that thinks thinking.

Hegel's Spirit, Community and the Kantian Template

So much mainly by way of exposition, but there are matters as much recessed as expressed here, and so we must backtrack. Spirit is very important in Hegel's struggles to acknowledge the contradictions and stresses of modernity while seeking a way of thinking which would also go beyond them and institute some new unity of life.³ The explorations of love in the earlier theological political writing suggest this overtly, as well as Hegel's engagements of an ethical and aesthetic sort. Hegel did tilt more and more towards reason. His growing dismay with what he perceived as the one-sidedness of Romanticism (itself reactive to the rationalism of Enlightenment) made it harder for him to rest with notions that smacked too much of the immediate, notions excessive to reason, to determination, to self-determination. Such notions seemed *less* than reason, not more. In so far as *Geist* is resonant of both love and reason, it offers resources to surpass and hold together these stresses. Spirit is not something abstractly rational. For instance, when we say a work of art is infused with spirit, there is a certain higher vivacity, hence immediacy of sorts, one pregnant with significance. Spirit also suggests a living overlap of the ethical and the reasonable. Equally so, when we speak of the spirit of truth, this is more than this or that determinate truth, making possible our fidelity to this truth and that. Most importantly, spirit is inseparable from a sense of *community*. It hints of power or powers that while determinate are also more than merely individual or subjective, as when we speak of the spirit of a people (*Volksgeist*). Hegel's life-long concern with spirit, evident between his early writings and those of his maturity, is inseparable from his struggles with the meaning of community, in its ethical and political dimensions, as well as in its religious. Hegel's mature trinitarian conception of God is not separable from these.

In early writings, *The Spirit of Christianity*, for instance, Hegel is clearly allergic to any form of supernatural spiritualism, or God 'beyond'. Yet if the emphasis is on 'nature', in the sense of immanence, *Geist* is 'supernatural', 'sur-natural', for, after all, it is not a thing of nature or in nature. It is beyond nature, but the 'beyond' of

nature is within nature itself, and emergent within nature, here construed as immanence. Historical humanity is this 'beyond' of nature within nature itself (T2 is immanent to T1, but it rises above it immanently in terms of its own becoming whole). Hegel twists and turns to avoid a 'beyond' beyond nature, turning around even the gospel also to make it conform to, or more comfortable for, immanence. Everything is 'natural', but what this means is shown in religion which attains the 'beyond' of nature within nature. This 'beyond' is no 'beyond' for its absoluteness is being here effected, or in process of self-realization. As I briefly suggested before, in his early writings basic ontological decisions are being effected. They fall into the background, but this does not mean they do not decisively influence the whole development that later is effected. Quite the contrary: if we understand these not now stated basic decisions, Hegel's discourse as a whole becomes more intelligible but also more questionable – most questionable with respect to his crucial reconfiguration of God's transcendence in immanent (sur)naturalistic terms.

Relative to the antinomy of autonomy and transcendence, the younger Hegel opted for self-determining being as more absolute than any transcendence as other. With the mature Hegel, spirit is defined by a reconfiguration of transcendence within a more inclusive self-determining divine process. Spirit is the divine power that actualizes itself in the community that claims for itself absolutely immanent self-determination. Christianity, for Hegel, mediates this absolutely immanent self-determination. While it accomplishes its completion religiously, it does not accomplish it in fully secular terms. Christianity is necessary for completed holistic immanence, but there is a more complete completion of holistic immanence.

Hegelians generally see red when Hegel is assimilated to supernaturalistic terms. Spirit is just what is *not* such a beyond. Of course, they are right. But then they fall back into silence about the peculiar characteristics of Hegelian 'naturalism'.⁴ Hegel's (historicist) naturalism is a matter of having your spiritualistic cake and eating it also; and all within holistic immanence itself. It trades off some of the resources of traditional religious views, at one level, respecting them, though respecting them only in the forms that pass the judgement tribunal of Hegelian reason, and so perhaps, at another level, respecting them less than it seems initially. The Hegelians of the spiritualist observance can have their god; while the worldly Hegelians can equally well claim to be true inheritors of his humanist legacy.

It would be foolish to forget the template for freedom as moral self-determination laid down by Kant at the foundations of the so-called revolution in philosophy. This template entered so intimately into Hegel's characteristic way of thinking that it is effective, even when Kant is being criticized. Kant spoke of religion within the limits of reason alone, such that when we turn to the kingdom of ends, we wonder about an important tension between moral and religious community. If the religious community is redefined in terms of the moral community, we wonder if a counterfeit double of religious community is already forged by Kant, with the kingdom of ends replacing the kingdom of God. Hegel found Kant's terms of reference too cramped to do justice to both ethical life and religious community. Yet the basic template of freedom as (social) self-determination is not given up. This deeply effects the logic of his view of spirit as God in community.

Kant was, like Hegel, interested in *history* as the progress of humanity. The ultimate community is the kingdom of ends, in which each human is an end in

itself, affirms something unconditional about humans, and in the whole, which gives it point and purpose. Without this, any sense of the whole would finally not only be meaningless but worthless. Kant's *Reich der Zwecke* is a rationalized and secularized version of the kingdom of God: rationalized in making no appeal to divine intervention or revelations in history; secular in that it is not God that makes us affirm that community, but rather that community might make us affirm God. But is this ideal community not a moral mimicry or counterfeit of the kingdom of God, if it is the unconditional community, or will be, and not God? Of course, Kant does not think that this community is the secular, moral surrogate for the God that we might otherwise affirm, or not. Rather it is the 'kingdom of God' that mimics this kingdom of ends, sometimes getting in its way, sometimes perhaps offering a helpful crutch for the rationally immature. But if only God is God, and everything else, even the higher values, is an idol if it claims to be God, *this* noble affirmation of the ideal community might well distort, indeed corrupt the ultimate community. It would turn the highest moral value into a hubristic usurpation of the one God – and this in the name of the moral good. If only God is God, and this community is not God, we are on very dangerous ground. Such thoughts may strike devoted Kantians as bordering on philosophical blasphemy. But, in another sense, it is the possible blasphemy of philosophy itself that is at stake. Philosophy exposes us to the highest temptation of spiritual pride where *corruptio optimi pessima*. Philosophical honesty requires we raise the same question with Hegel. He claims absolute spirit is absolutely immanent in community, first religious, and then, 'post'-religious. While this is conceived in terms critical of, and claiming to surpass Kant's moralized version of the ultimate community, does Hegel not risk producing his own counterfeit double?

When we compare Kant's kingdom of ends and Hegel's concept of the spiritual community, the first is a moral, the second initially is a religious community. Given that it is an ideal, and given that the human being is the only inherent end in nature, Kant's kingdom is also a community that is 'more' than nature: it is 'sur-natural'. It is 'more' than nature yet somewhat immanent in nature, a 'beyond' in immanence itself: transcendence as self-transcendence (T2) is doing in immanence some of the work of transcendence as other (T3). Kant's transcendental philosophy seems to avoid history, but history cannot be avoided. If the kingdom of ends is an *ideal* (only an ideal, Kant says in the *Groundwork*), it is also an ideal that calls to be effected in history (some recent Kant scholarship emphasizes this). History not only points to some progress in realizing this community, it also sets it as a *task*. Hegel, I think, shoulders this task by trying to show that it is no longer merely a task. By contrast to Kant, he criticizes any merely ideal community. What is a task in history for Kantians, he thinks is already carried out – carried out *religiously* by spirit in community. We need not dictate to history what it should be; in the history of spirit the kingdom of God is being effected. This is no mere task, it is already effective. The religious community of spirit is more than moral in Kant's sense, yet both are above nature, super-natural, but within history itself. Neither is merely ideal as a beyond, but historical as immanent process. Hegel surely has some point here. One might say that a mere ideal could not even function as an ideal, could not be effective as an ideal, if in some sense it was not already real or being realized. The ideal must already be at work to function as ideal which lures us towards what

is to be. Then the question comes: what is this power 'already at work'? Is there greater ambiguity and enigma attached to it than Hegel grants? Is it a power transcending history, leavening history, without being reducible to history? These questions should haunt Hegel, and we will haunt him with them.

Hegelian spirit is the self-actualizing idea(l) – self-actualizing in historical community. Of course, to claim the effectiveness of the Kantian template is not to say Hegel subscribed to Kant's moral God 'beyond'. Hegel's *Geist* God is immanent in community. Yet this immanent *Geist* God is more absolutely conformed to absolutized self-determining, and hence more fully realizes 'autonomy'. Hegel often speaks of the ethical as the genuinely religious: the ethical community as the highest immanence of the absolute spirit. This is not Kant, since for Hegel ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) is beyond morality (*Moralität*), but it is not unKantian either, in that it is the ethical that is the religious. Hegel's ethical-religious community is thus a speculative reworking of Kant's *Reich der Zwecke*. He has grappled with a secularized Kingdom of God, and there is an actualized end, not just an ideal community of ends. Thus Hegel's claims are far stronger than Kant's. The end is constitutive, not merely regulative. It is accomplished: 'the battle is over'. This citation from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* could and would be applied by Hegel *beyond* religion. But 'beyond' religion, the end is accomplished in immanence. This end is not a 'beyond' that regulates the present; there is a self-completion in the present. Nothing is more striking than the way Hegel constantly preaches against the moral preachers of the Kantian 'ought'. What is equally striking is how he also, willy nilly, strikes the pose of a preacher in his own cause. Woe to you who do not grant the kingdom here and now completed!⁵

The preacher casts the die early, revising Kant's kingdom of ends through a more radical absolutization of self-determining freedom, with no 'mere' givens, such as the 'fact of reason' so derided by Kant's idealistic successors. What is given is absolved of 'mere' givenness, and speculatively 'elevated' into the self-given, and self-giving. Our question sounds again like an old doom: Who is the 'self' of the self-giving, the 'self' of God's 'self-communication', the 'God' of that 'self'? Hegel's doctrine of subjective, objective and absolute Spirit will shed light on this, as well as the consummation of the end in the third. The recurrent logic running through all this is most deeply immanent in Hegel's view of the third moment of the trinity as spirit immanent in community, with which the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* culminates. We arrive at the *nec plus ultra* of holistic immanence. Does this complete the counterfeit God?

Subjective, Objective, Absolute Spirit: Absolute Immanence

One of the attractions for Hegel of *Geist* is that it is more richly suggestive of a certain fullness of mind and being than either *Verstand* or *Vernunft*. *Vernunft* and *Geist* are interchangeable, of course, but an immanently differentiated determinacy seems possible with *Geist* in terms of different forms of spirit, each dealing with wholes of sorts, but different wholes, and all contributing to the Whole of the wholes, though only the third truly is absolute. What then of subjective, objective and absolute spirit?

Subjective spirit has to do with the emergence of subjectivity in the human being. Nature may be the self-externalization of the Idea, but nature is also impotent with respect to spirit. The different religions show the progressive liberation from and emergence of humanity above nature. Hegel has an entire philosophy of subjective spirit which cannot detain us, but the relevance for religion is that we are 'beyond' the categories of nature as nature. The emergence of subjectivity and its powers of self-knowing, and self-determining, are decisive for the notion of God. As we have seen, there are more primitive forms of religion whose sense of subjectivity is so little developed that spirit remains immersed in nature, or in struggle to free itself from it. This is reflected diversely, in the religions of nature. We see the point clearly when nature is 'overcome' as with the emergence of the Olympian gods in the gigantomachia with the chthonic Titans.

If this emphasis on subjectivity is central to Hegel's whole view, it is not intended in any subjectivistic sense. Subjectivistic subjectivity, in fact, fails to realize the full promise of spirit that is waking up to itself in the subject. It must be more than merely subjective. Thus, for instance, there is a certain religious significance to the Greek philosophical enlightenment. When Hegel thinks of Socrates he refers to the principle of subjectivity, but now in terms of the Idea as universal, liberated from the entanglements of sensuous externality. This arising of trans-individual subjectivity is properly for Hegel an emergence into self-knowing of spirit in its infinitude. It is not incidental that the same powers of subjectivity show something of their highest religious significance in the ancient comedy which shows the infinite power of subjectivity to debunk and negate even the gods.

An absolute power is vested in subjectivity, no longer merely subjective but disclosive of more embracing and self-determining spirit. Increasing freedom from external determination goes with increased freedom of self-determination. This investiture of self-determining subjectivity is made properly complete in the historical happening of Christianity. Subjective spirit points beyond itself for it is the seed of absolute spirit that is growing in it, not merely individually but in terms of a larger process of historical unfolding. Christianity universalizes the religious significance of subjective spirit in its inwardness as spirit. But there is nothing merely inward or individual about this, since it is the *Geist* of historical humanity that is shaping itself in all of this.

We come to Hegel's *objective spirit*. This is the social objectification of this *Geist* in more overt historical form in the cultural and ethical institutions of the society in general and the state in particular. Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is Hegel's most important work in relation to objective spirit, though this work cannot be abstracted from his larger systematic viewpoint. Here we note again the continuity and discontinuity with Kant. The individual freedom crucial in many moral philosophies is not denied here but said to be an abstract, subjective indeterminacy till it determines itself more fully in the social forms that give it its full worldly life. I cannot give an account of all of the details, but these are consistent with the turn from the singular existential to the worldly and the world historical, such as we saw before with Hegel's account of evil. Subjective spirit only realizes its freedom as self-determining through the forms of its relation to others, that is, through its social objectification. But these forms of social otherness prove finally not to be alienating.

Why? The logic of the concept shows why. If indeterminate freedom determines itself in those forms of social otherness, these others are *its own* determination, indeed its own *self-determination*, and hence freedom comes to *itself* most fully in their otherness. This is the form of *social self-determination* for Hegel.⁶ All the different determinations, those of abstract right and property, of morality, of ethical life, with its shapes of family, civil society and the state, all these are teleologically oriented to more and more complete social self-determination. While Hegel offers us a doctrine of social 'inter-subjectivity', the logic that claims to comprehend it is still one of *self-determination*. This has to be borne in mind: there may be communications, communities of social freedom which cannot be captured in the form of social *self-determination*, and the logic of holistic immanence. But one can see the point: objective *Geist* is the social, historical process by which the internal indeterminacy of subjectivity, and also its internal cleavages, are given anchor in the world, and hence given a form that rescues us from both the abstract universal of Enlightenment, the irrational concreteness of Romanticism, and the precious religious subjectivism of Pietism.

Finally there is *absolute spirit* which overcomes the one-sided dualisms of subjective and objective spirit. It is the fuller self-knowing and self-realization of each. The lack of ethical substance with subjective spirit is overcome, and humanity understands its self-determining freedom as grounded in the ethical social order. The lack of proper subjectivity to ethical substance is also overcome in the ethical order that socially objectifies the infinity of spirit. This is first accomplished in religious terms, and with Christianity in the spiritual community. This brings us back to where we commenced above in treating of Hegel's discussion of the holy spirit in the religious community at the culmination of *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Why not stop there? Because this absolute holistic immanence is not absolute enough, or holistic enough, or immanent enough, without its worldly embodiment in historical institutions of ethical and political self-determination. It is the task of the *modern state* to satisfy the holy spirit here by thus consecrating secular life, and when that is accomplished, the fullness can be pronounced. Short of that we are all, as it were, children of the curse of the wandering Abraham.⁷

This is not evident at the end of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* of 1827 (but see note 3 above), and no doubt Hegel, under suspicion by hostile religious opponents, did not want to muddy the waters by too aggressively pointing beyond the religious form of spiritual community. That might smack too openly of relativizing the absolute claims made by religious community, and even by Hegel himself. But if we look at other works, say, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, the intention is quite clear. What the Reformation inaugurates as religious freedom is completed politically as the French Revolution. Every revolution might need its reformation, as Hegel suggests, but it is the revolution that is the worldly end that completes the turn to self-determining freedom, purportedly the *true purpose* of spiritual reformation. The ethical political community is the consummation of the religious community of spirit. Even granting the different *amplitude* of Hegel's embrace, he is in the same family as Spinoza and Kant here.

A nation with a slavish religion tends to be a nation of slaves.⁸ But does the slavery reflect the religion, or the religion the slavery? Hegel grants there is religion beyond slavery and mastery, and Protestant Christianity is it, but is there a being

religious beyond Hegel's social self-determination? You might object that if we look at the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel seems to reserve for absolute spirit a *transcendence beyond* the state. The state, he says, is not a work of art, but exists in the realm of contingency and caprice. Absolute *Geist* is higher than the subjective and the objective, and takes form as art, as religion and as philosophy. Here the ultimate contradictions of *Geist* are expressed and overcome, and in that regard, they are higher than ('beyond') the state, and individual subjectivity.

Some commentators have sucked consolation from this as a sign of divine *transcendence* beyond the circle of immanent social holism.⁹ The consolation may console but speculatively speaking it is, finally, more in the nature of a placebo. If there is a *transcendence* 'beyond' the state, the point is not *transcendence* (as other), but the more absolute holistic immanence that finally is given expression in philosophy as thought at home with itself, thought thinking itself. Hegel's *transcendence* 'beyond' the state is not *transcendence* enough, for the same logic of the immanent whole holding sway over subjective and objective spirit also holds sway over absolute spirit, and there is no true *transcendence* of the God beyond the whole.

Putting that aside, one must ask about the blurring of necessary differences in the *Philosophy of Right* when 'in the process of world history [the state] reveals and actualizes itself as the universal world spirit (*Weltgeist*) whose right is supreme' (*PR* §, 33; also § 30, end). Can one call the world spirit God? Would the *Weltgeist*, if taken as the ultimate God, be a counterfeit of God? Hegel's protectors, whether humanistic or religious, will remind us that Hegel himself said: 'the universal spirit or world spirit is not the same thing as God. It is the rationality of spirit in its worldly existence.'¹⁰ When we hear this, we wonder what 'God' is this that is *not the same* as the universal spirit or world spirit? Can there be any such 'God' for Hegel that is *thus not the same or other*? Think of our earlier worry about an equivocation in *Deus sive historia*. Think of how Hegel's 'God' determines itself in nature and history. Can we now be put off by being told they are *not the same*? Why do we feel we are wrestling with an octopus? One hand of sameness is taken off, but another hand, and ultimately the hand of the same, has been clamped on elsewhere. Let the denials of sameness be endlessly repeated, and still we feel we are only more effectively wrapped in sameness. Where is the '*not the same*' in Hegel which does justice to the true difference of God?

Whatever else, the world spirit is just the power that seems finally to hold sway in history, and in one epoch its agent is this people, in another epoch that people. Sometimes we are led to believe that Hegel had a *faith* in an ultimate power beyond the evident vagaries of the fluxions of worldly power ebbing and flowing by the moon. Other times he seems to sanctify the local fluxion that has succeeded to temporary ascendancy in this our amazing patch of the universal impermanence. Or are we left *equivocal between* this enigmatic faith that, in fact, cannot absolutely justify itself to itself, and this idolization of the powerful cocks who crow on this-*here* heap? If it is the former, Hegel's philosophical claim as absolutely self-justifying is not justified, and we find our way, or stray, between insight and blindness. If it is the latter, we return to something more like Hobbes's *bellum omnium contra omnes* than like the kingdom of God on earth. And this, no matter Hegel's faith that this war will be the father of all things consummated. More, if we

identify the war of the first with the reconciled people of the second, has not the Prince of Darkness usurped the place of the Prince of Peace? And we are back then with the exoneration, in world history, of the wily wisdom of the serpent?

There is for Hegel a higher power in history than individual states, but what is it? Suppose there is a kind of rationality in the global fluxions of power, that even baptizes itself with the ideal names of ethics. But should we call this God? Despite the demurral mentioned above, Hegel's philosophy of religion gives us no help in keeping faith with the '*not the same*' of God. If we do call this higher power 'God', at best are we consecrating a power equivocal between good and evil, at worst an evil power masking itself as the good? And if that 'God' is so equivocal between good and evil, in what sense is this 'God' God? How *doubly equivocal* all things now look when speculative dialectic has assured us we are beyond all equivocality, all otherness sublated! But this is what we here need to breathe: an otherness not thus sublated. Have we not just returned to a Spinozism at the level of *Geist*, where finally also, all *Te Deums* to reason having being sung, it is the victorious power that claims the throne? And what difference then is there between a king and a tyrant, or a god and the serpent?

One can appreciate here Kierkegaard's repeated refrain that Hegel's system has no ethics. This seems very puzzling, given the overt character of the *Philosophy of Right*. Aside from what Kierkegaard means by ethics, Hegel's move to world history does seem to have the effect of suspending a sense of the unconditional character of ethical good (certainly Kant's moral good). If world history – the darkling plain where angry armies clash by night – has the ultimate right – and *die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht* – we may nod to the hard realism of Hegel's acquiescence, but must abhor the consecration of horror that seems to follow.

We notice again how some Hegel interpreters are quick to reassure us: do not worry, there is nothing offensive here, do not be alarmed. The *Weltgericht* is not any Last Judgement. But if Hegel does not mean the last judgement, why not speak less equivocally, and not least, since there seems no 'beyond' to world history in any meaningful sense? What does not reassure us is not only *what* he says, but the implications of what he says, here and elsewhere. Hush, hush: fear not, world history is not the rule of 'might is right' – does not Hegel explicitly warn us against this? And you might here reintroduce the religious Hegel, since religion is one sphere of absolute spirit, and then say: Hegel's God is a God of ethical power; after all does he not praise both the Greeks and the Jews for their transcendence of mere power, be it of nature or primitive humans, in their conceptions of the divine? There is a providence in world history that makes it the genuine theodicy. There is undoubtedly something to be said for this. As I have already indicated, I suspect this theodicy as being really more a *kakodicy*. Whether Hegel is *entitled* to think of God as an ethical God is something that, to my mind, is not deeply explored by Hegel himself. Hegel's understanding of the ethical is defined by social self-determination, not by any freedom beyond self-determination: there is no such freedom in Hegel, even when we move beyond objective to absolute spirit. Absolute spirit completes freedom as self-determination; there is no 'beyond' of this self-determination, be it of human community or the divine. Hegel's equivocation on transcendence as *agapeic* comes home to roost.

So we find an interesting combination in Hegel of mutated Spinozistic holism, and Kantian autonomy (self-determination). The template of the second was coupled with the first as an immanently mutating virus in the Hegelian system. The body of the system may claim to show the face of the Biblical God, but the energies that course through the One whole speak so much of holistic immanence that it is surely a justified question whether the ethical God of Biblical personalism has been superseded. Spinozism served for Hegel and many of his generation as a beacon beyond the personal moral God who remained in Kant 'beyond', and as 'beyond' stymied, so they held, the immanent achievement of the absolute whole. The absolute whole cannot be that kind of God. If there is some talk of absolute self, this is really a self-less Self.

Let us be done with all weaseling that claims Hegel is theist, even if substance is replaced by spirit – as it is.¹¹ Not coincidentally, this is Hegel's own way of wriggling off the hook of pantheism – by denying that God is substance. Yet the same holistic logic applies to substance, to subject, to spirit, and hence the wriggling is disingenuous. We are always in the same circle of immanence. There is no final judgement beyond history, because this would be a 'beyond' again, and Hegel will have none of this, and if this is so, there is no God beyond the totality of world history, and if this is so, how enticing to call humanity the god of the historical whole, even if humanity as *Geist* must struggle to make itself absolute. History is the medium, call it a 'between', if you must, in which *Geist* is self-absolutizing. And we might make bold enough to call this self-absolutizing process 'God', except that this word carries resonances that if heard properly would speak unequivocally that this is an idol, not God.

The left-Hegelian interpretation is the less disingenuous because of this, in a way less equivocating than Hegel himself. In my view the reason why Hegel and the right-Hegelians disguise their equivocation by calling it speculative dialectic is because they actually *embody* the equivocity involved in identifying humanity and God. They lack self-knowledge of what it means to embody this equivocity. They may call it the speculative resolution or reconciliation but it is merely this equivocation raised to a higher power, to the absolute power. But to raise this equivocation to the absolute power is disastrous. Perhaps it shows some odd 'nobility' to equivocate here, since to come right out and proclaim this identity is to reveal the disaster without a mask, though the terrible irony here is that those who did come straight out thought it was no disaster, but exactly the reverse, now at last releasing the true human freedom into its own divine powers. This celebration of the equivocity as the solution to the riddle of history only shows that the counterfeit double of God, in this case, historical man, had fallen under the spell of his own god, namely himself as the religious equivocation *par excellence*.

Man then makes himself the false double of God and the falsity of this counterfeit enters so systematically into his self-understanding that he thinks he is at last the true divinity. It may take centuries for the full effects of such a toxic doubling to run their course. In the meantime the toxin keeps mutating, sometimes into relatively harmless forms, sometime taking on new virulence, and one would be a fool not to worry that the same strain of virus, seemingly now domesticated, might not a generation, two generations hence, throw up a new, more resistant, more toxic.

more catastrophic mutation. The karma of the counterfeiting of spirit is just this return, in mutated forms, of the false doubles of God.

Clearly one does not, cannot accuse Hegel of complicity in all of this. But there is a kind of responsibility: the lethal will to consistency of his system, and the view of God yoked to it, join to function as a kind of dialectical enchantment. The roots of its intellectual intoxication can produce an opium of the intellectuals – an opium itself a mutation of the opium of absolute autonomy, the opium of absolute immanence, the opium of absolute self-determining humanity. Hegel is one of the magi of immanence who create these potions of the spirit.

One last query: even though Hegel seems to point beyond objective spirit to absolute spirit, does not religion *need objective spirit* in order to *become* itself, since it is a *result* of historical becoming? What then of the trans-historical? How could religion's absoluteness in any sense free itself from the relativities of time, and their duplicitous equivocations? It too will be another form of objective spirit, to be judged before the last judgement of world history. But Biblical religion speaks of a God of history who is more than history, who is above history, who as lord of creation is more than creation, who as good is transhuman in goodness, but loves in goodness the good of the human, and in that sense is personal. This second sense of religion as *hyperbolic to history* Hegel will only acknowledge to say that the dimension of height has been 'overcome' immanently in the Christian story of the entry of God into time, and the death of this hyperbolic God on the cross. Hegel's God is a hyperbole of immanent power, who will tolerate no god beside it, and even less so, any God beyond it. In Hegel's historicism of objective/absolute spirit, religion as an historical product cannot be a 'foundation' except in a relative sense, and hence its absolute claim is also relativized.

You might reply: 'Good. Every religion, in its historical relativity, risks becoming an idol by identifying itself with the absolute God.' I agree. I agree this can happen with all religions. But then, in one way or another, we are back to the question of the absolute God, and in Hegel there seems, finally, no absolute God beyond world history. If religion is the therapy of idols, its task is just to free us from the illusions of world history, its false absoluteness. It relativizes world history. For Hegel, the relativizing power of world history seems the more absolute power, but if this is so, there is finally no escape from the false gods of world history. Even knowing this in the Hegelian system, all we can do is to live falsely: either in consenting to the idol, or in alienation from it (since one knows it is an idol); even then this alienation is without a way out, for any way out, on these terms, would just be another idol.

The choice within Hegel: either consecration of a false absolute or critique of false absolutes, itself unsustainable, since the 'God' in the name of which the critique is enacted cannot but be another idol, even when it claims to be God, most especially when it claims to be God. If there is no God beyond the whole, all gods are counterfeit doubles of that (putatively non-existent) God. Far from solving the problem Hegel has made matters immeasurably worse, because he offers the semblance of rational justification for being satisfied with our dwelling in the circle of the false double of God. Our Hegelian salvation is our being in bondage to this false double, and not knowing it is a false double. Hegelian absolute knowing is a counterfeit of absolute knowing, for we know nothing absolute.

Spirit and the Religious Community of Agapeic Service

I ventured at the outset that the issue is not to deny the need for ethical-political institutions that intermediate human freedoms, but to recognize our need for more finessed discernment for the differences and porosities between religious and ethical-political communities, and for freedom beyond self-determination, individual or social. In this light, the question of spirit and community can be connected with our understanding of *loves*, a matter touched on in Chapter 1. An adequate account of different forms of love conditions one's understanding of different relations of self and other, and hence of different communities. If spirit for Hegel is inseparable from community, and if Hegel is deficient in accounting for different loves, we may find that the needed difference between the religious and political community, and the transcendence of the former to the second is blurred because of this. More specifically, Hegel is not at all clear on the differences between, as I put it, the communities of erotic sovereignty and agapeic service, and hence ends up systematically equivocating on spirit.¹² Their difference does not figure as it should. Something like a community of immanent excellence is the consummate form for him, and even Christianity points in this direction in terms of spiritual community, but not consummately enough, unless immanent excellence is nothing but the historical self-completion of humanity's, or 'God's' erotic sovereignty. Humanity or 'God' consummates its self-communication in the historical community of erotic sovereignty: the coming to self of humanity, self-becoming from lacking indeterminacy, through different determinations, to full social self-determination.

Spirit and community, in an agapeic light, look quite different. The spiritual religious community is not exhausted by the immanent excellences of erotic sovereignty. The relation between the things of Caesar and the things of God is not quite so simple as speculative dialectic has it. Hegel gives to Caesar things that are God's, gives to immanent things the things of God, and in the process deforms the things of God, and indeed the things of Caesar.¹³ The spirit of agapeic community seeks to be true to the promise of the given goodness of being in creation and history. It knows the horror of evil that defects from this promise, knows also that the terms of immanence alone cannot redeem the promise, betrayed or not. It knows that the hyperbolic good of the God beyond the whole is alone proportionate to evil in the hyperbolic dimension, for its asymmetry in giving again, relative to any finite giving, is ultimately absolutely singular in the dimension of height. The religious community also looks beyond the immanent excellences of erotic sovereignty, the glories of Caesar, to the God beyond holistic immanence. Agapeic service is here now solicited, in both religious and more worldly communities.

The 'beyond' here would appear to Hegel as servility before an other, rather than a service beyond erotic sovereignty, and immanent will to power. Hegel has not got clear enough to think properly of an agapeic service beyond servility, and erotic sovereignty. Such a service is not driven by the self-determination of the *conatus essendi*, but in rapport with the *passio essendi* of mortal creatures, and this as a sign of being as gift. Hegel has difficulty seeing beyond only defective immanence in the sign of transcendence communicated in agapeic service, has difficulty in seeing a 'being good' higher and more absolute than the immanent excellences of erotic sovereignty.

To do justice to the matter would be a study in itself (see Desmond 2001a, chapters 15 and 16), nevertheless, the implications are clearly immense. A deficient understanding of religious community *vis-à-vis* agapeic transcendence leads to a false absolutization of Hegel's version of holistic immanence, a false absolutization itself pregnant with fatal equivocations that unfold after Hegel with ever more disastrous versions of holistic immanence, fueled by humanistic hostility to religion, now expressed, now reserved, and the God beyond the whole. In seeming not to muddy the waters, Hegel in fact has done so. Muddying the waters may look like a fine holistic immanence in which everything melds with everything else, but the dirt has been stirred up, and will not settle soon, and we cannot see those differences that keep us in mind of God.

There are many aspects to the matter, but I will just stress the excess to self-determination, whether conceived individual, socially, or in terms of the so-called immanent whole, to the communication of good offered by the God of agapeic service. This I take to be the God of Biblical monotheism, and for Christians incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ. (I have never received a satisfactory answer from those who make Hegel a kind of contemporary pluralist as to why, if he is a lover of the Biblical God, at the end and highest culmination of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Science*, Hegel quotes Aristotle, no, *hymns* Aristotle, on God as *noēsis tēs noēseōs*, and in Greek to boot.) The spirit of this service draws attention to what cannot be mastered or comprehended in any logic stressing inclusive self-determination, not even the erotic self-determination that seeks its fuller self-completion in its own otherness. The source of the communication of this spirit of agapeic good, the relation between self and other it possibilizes, and the very between constituting the community of love between them, cannot be rendered in Hegel's logic. This logic is a systematic deformation of the excess of transcendence that is required by the spirit as agapeic communication of good.

This excess remains not only relative to all worldly societies, but all religious communities that claim absolute identity with the divine. The language of such identity is entirely inappropriate to this kind of community. And it is community we are talking about, not dualistic othernesses that seek their speculative *Aufhebung*, as with Hegel. In the very intimate immanence of the spirit as agapeic giving, there is also always a hiddenness since it can never be exhausted, even in the fullness of communication that it is. There is no dialectical logic of the full that could handle this communication, at once absolute openness and absolute hiddenness. Dialectic, whether Hegel's speculative form or any other, is brought to a limit it cannot surpass through its own self-transcending. This is another kind of limit that is not thought within the terms of Hegel's speculative dialectic, nor indeed in any form of holistic immanence.

One might argue that even *immanently* this holistic immanence points to what exceeds its own terms. Let me offer one or two pointers. In all forms of community there is always a tension between oneness and manyness: a tension not dispelled by the talk of community, especially when the logic determining the way we understand the community is a form of mediation with self in and through one's own otherness. This last gives the impression of genuine plurality, but how genuine it is remains in question, if it is so in Hegel's sense: a many *within* the encompassing whole, the many as different self-manifestations of the self-mediating one. While this many

can run to antagonism and extremity, the fact is that with Hegel all are manifestation of the *same spirit*. There is no agapeic release of the finite other into a space of a different between. Religion, on this view, is the process in which humanity wakes up to this mediating sameness of spirit in the community. This is what community of spirit is for Hegel. It is not human being's agapeic participation in an ultimate porosity to the spirit of God within its most intimate idiotic soul, and in ethical communities which try to enact agapeic service for the neighbour, and live humanly the promise of the height of transcendence.

Sometimes one is uncertain if one sees small hints of this here and there in Hegel, but if these hints are there at all, we are even more reminded of what his logic cannot accommodate, a logic which rather tends to the abrogation of the essential difference of agapeic service all along the line: in the self-communication from full to full to full in the inner life of the divine; in the relation of God to creation; in the relation of the divine to the human spirit; in the relation of one human to another; in relation to the singular self in its inward infinity, this its own immanent otherness; in relation to the divine spirit beyond every religious community on earth; in relation to immanent solidarity, the secret *compassio essendi* of the divine spirit with the human.

We need more than Hegel's inclusive self-mediating dialectic. This one form of inclusive self-mediating dialectic cannot 'cover' what God, creation, man each is, either in itself or in its relation to the others. Even if God is absolutely self-mediating, hence absolutely at home with self, there is more to be said, both with regard to creation, and the community of surplusgood that saves, and especially with regard to what remains in reserve of God in relation to creation as other, and the free difference of the human. Grant this reserve, and there is a different mediation *between* origin and creation, an other-mediation, not self-mediation; an intermediation still a togetherness even in otherness, and allowing for happenings at the edge of mediation, allowing even of the free power that turns against intermediation in evil. If this other-mediation, call it agapeic release, also applies to spirit, it changes how we understand the character of religious community. To absolutize self-mediation, be it as dialectically, speculatively qualified as you like, would be to create a false god, not at all to become open to God in ultimate self-transcendence. The other 'inter'-mediation is not within the determination of any self-mediation, relativizes the self-determination of human self-mediation, brings home to us our being given to ourselves from the outset and for always. The opening of human self-determination, and the rupture to its self-absolutizing, is by an other reserved on the edge of our mediation, and yet with whom we are in community, even if that community is not our doing, such that even our power freely to enter community is already conditional on the gift of the absolute other.

Consider this argument, directed immanently to Hegel's speculative self-mediating whole: if there is *more than one* source of infinite self-transcending, then the mediation between these sources cannot be self-mediation once again, even if both are self-mediating beings. If, for instance, God is self-mediating and transcending, and if the human being is self-mediating and transcending, then the mediation *between them* cannot be any form of immanent self-mediation. This is so even from God's side. There is a between where they are together but this is not best described in the language of the inclusive whole. The infinitude manifest in self-transcending,

from either side, is always in excess of any self-mediating wholeness. If in the free community of spirit, we are dealing with a *plurality* of beings marked by self-transcending that is infinitely open, we are also dealing with the pluralization of the excess of spirit itself that is qualitatively redoubled beyond any immanent holism.

Put somewhat otherwise, the asymmetrical differences of human self-transcending and divine transcendence, even while they are together in community, cannot be amalgamated into any holistic immanence of inclusive unity. Difference here, even in asymmetrical relativity, is not a negative, to-be-sublated condition; it is affirmative for itself. This is eminently the case when the asymmetrical difference is thought with respect to the agapeic relation. Difference here makes possible the integrity of each being that enters into community with the divine. It is necessary to their being together, and necessarily to be affirmed as difference. If the 'being together', or 'absolute relativity' of God and creation/humanity suggests a pluralized dialectic, this cannot be an absolutely inclusive self-mediation through otherness, for this latter subordinates the very pluralism that is constitutive of the community as such. Otherwise the agapeic relation simply has been left out of consideration completely or distorted. Just as otherness has to be reconceived less dualistically, the pluralism of community has to be reconceived in terms that must depart from immanent inclusive holism.

From an agapeic view, spirit has more to do with the overwhole power that possibilizes the between: a fullness of creative giving that is not identical with any finite being given, nor any of the relations between finite beings, nor any social communities formed by their togetherness; and yet it creatively makes them possible, nay creates them as actual in their open promise, and as other to itself; and in their being given to be, divine spirit is not at all mediating with itself, but releasing what it gives to be into the goodness of its own otherness. There in the given as given, we find the astonishing promise, most especially evident with human beings, of participating in the agape of the divine spirit, in the giving as giving, participating in a promise of being good that itself calls for communication between humans as finite creatures and the ultimate source of giving, a communication in ultimate porosity or nakedness we might call religious. This promise of being good also calls for communities of ethical freedom between humans that it possibilizes as good, and actually good, to the extent that we participate and freely consent to live the spirit of generosity of the agape. To a superficial glance, Hegel's holistic immanence with its version of 'all in all' might not seem entirely strange to this. But to the extent that it airbrushes divine transcendence as other out of its immanent whole, it not only loses sight of the excess fullness of the agape, but also its reserves of 'too muchness', or surplus good that solicit the first and ultimate reverence before the God who is more than the whole and any finite being within the whole.

Notes

- 1 'The spirit is essentially individual, but in the sphere of world history, we are not concerned with particulars and need not confine ourselves to individual instances, or attempt to trace everything back to them. The spirit in history is an individual which is

both universal in nature and at the same time determinate: in short, it is the nation in general, and the spirit we are concerned with is the *spirit of the nation* (*Volksgeist*)' Hegel (1975), 51.

- 2 In the 1821 Lectures (*LPR* 3, 161–2), Hegel worries about ending on a 'discordant note' when referring to the 'passing away' of the religious community. He says: 'For us, philosophical knowledge has resolved this discord and the purpose of these lectures was precisely to reconcile reason with religion ... But this reconciliation is only a partial one, lacking outward universality. Philosophy forms ... a sanctuary apart ... an isolated order of priests ...'. The end of the 1827 Lectures gives the last word to philosophy without this note of discord, and the passing over of religion into ethics and the state is overt in 1831 (*LPR* 1, 451): the cultivation of subjectivity beyond natural immediacy and the heart towards its universal purpose 'is then consummated as the ethical realm, and by this route, religion passes over into ethics and the state'.
- 3 On Spirit, see Theunissen (1970), Peperzak (1987), Stillman (1987), Eley (1990), Dow Magnus (2001), Olson (1992), Schlitt (1984, 1990).
- 4 Hegel says in many places that it is not just in nature that the signs of the divine are to be sought; more fully and adequately they are to be found in history. History is the theodicy of spirit; spirit there is twice born, and hence knows itself as itself, and not as estranged other. History is the more proper place for the self-knowledge of the spirit.
- 5 *PR*, § 360: the 'present has cast off its barbarism and unjust arbitrariness, and truth has cast off its otherworldliness and contingent force, so that the true reconciliation, which reveals the *state*, as the image and actuality of reason, has become objective'.
- 6 See *PR* § 124A; § 261, *Zus*: the right of subjective freedom of the particular is retained in modern state, and marks its difference to antiquity.
- 7 In the early writings Abraham is the wandering Jew condemned to be without community (*ETW*, 185–6; *Nohl*, 245–6) and for whom there is no settling down. Jesus helps resolve this Jewish problem by pointing the way to spirit in community. The intimate connection of religion and politics is clear. '[A] free state and a slavish religion are incompatible' (*Enz*, § 552). Hegel says that 'religion passes over into ethics and the state' (*LPR*, 1, 451). Does this mean that the state is, so to say, the more inclusive cult? This passing of religion over into the state is discussed in 1831 but not in the lectures of 1821, the end of which speaks of a *passing away* of community. Hegel here would have had to end on a 'discordant note', except that philosophers reconcile reason and religion. How the world, the 'empirical present day', will find its way beyond this discordance is not the business of the priesthood of philosophers ('an isolated order of priests, who must not mix with the world') *LPR*, 3, 161–2. This 'discordant note', as mentioned in note 2, is not struck in the later lecture series. One thinks here too of how Kant sometimes suggested that 'revelation' might be seen as natural, thus an instrument that might be discarded when we mature. Hegel is not starkly instrumentalist, yet there is the question of the state appearing to be more absolute than religious community with reference to the consummation of the freedom of holistic immanence. There is also Hegel's 'wavering' as to what extent philosophy is the true consummated reconciliation in holistic immanence: sometimes a priesthood set apart, sometimes fully reconciled – at once absolute worshippers and the ultimate agents of reason.
- 8 'An inferior god or a nature god has inferior, natural and unfree human beings as its correlates' (*LPR*, 203). We saw this harshly stated with regard to 'unnatural' religion, namely, Judaism, especially in the earlier writings, but Hegel puts it this way in 1831: 'A people that has a bad concept of God has also a bad state, bad government, and bad laws' (*LPR*, 1, 452).
- 9 See, for instance, Louis Dupré's article in Stillman (1984).
- 10 *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction: Reason in History*, (Hegel,

1975) 213. Pinkard (2000), 494 claims: 'In *unequivocal language* Hegel told his audience' (emphasis added) that the universal spirit or world spirit was not the same as God. Unequivocal language? I find *nothing unequivocal* about it, and I know much more about Hegel's system than, I suspect, the vast majority of his audience did. Nor do we find ourselves unequivocally comforted when Hegel tells us that world-historical heroes are not to be judged on the scale of morality. There is something to that, of course, if we define morality within certain limits, but I cannot help thinking of the affinity with the Romantic artist claiming not to be judged by ordinary morality (I know what Hegel says about Romanticism), or Nietzsche's *Übermensch* 'beyond good and evil'. Very well, there is a 'beyond' but the whole crux is the character of this 'beyond' and whether Hegel helps with thinking 'beyonds'.

11 See Harris (1997), and O'Regan (2002).

12 See Desmond (2001a) 499–501, on the idols of the universal. Hegel's inability to articulate the difference of the communities of erotic sovereignty and agapeic service goes back to his earliest writings, a defect not overcome by his turning from love to the concept, for the defect in his understanding of love is mirrored in the logical structure of the concept, and this twofold defect he never overcame. He systematically compounded the defect, and reformulated the whole in the light of his blindness. When Hegel thinks of religion and ethical community, this is so tied to social self-determination that Hegel has tin ears for the fullness of what is at play, and the fullness of love demanded by the community of agapeic service. Not only does he not have the intellectual resources to think it, but it cannot be thought in the terms of immanent self-determination, or mutual recognition. It is beyond these, and returns us rather to those asymmetries that I discussed in previous chapters, now the asymmetries of a love that does not seek a return to itself in unconditionally giving itself to the other. It is important to bring finesse to bear on differences here. Lacking them, the fine discriminations to approach the religious community also become lacking. The temptation might follow philosophically to reconstruct religion as an ethical underwriting of the modern bourgeois state. Hegel's social self-determination never leaves Kant behind in transforming him entirely. What is missing is how agapeic love illuminates the relation of T3 and T2.

13 Nietzsche spoke of a Roman Caesar with the soul of Christ, and it is clear that it is the Roman Caesar who is to serve for the transformed and transforming *Übermensch*. Hegel is not entirely different to Nietzsche, in that political power supersedes the spirit of religious community, and the state is the earthly 'God'. But Nietzsche, like Hegel, did not understand with finesse the spirit of Jesus as agapeic service. They give us different versions of erotic sovereignty and its worldly immanence as the ultimate, either in the individuality or the community.

Chapter 8

On the Reserves of God

The Reserves of God

Does the search for God inherently lend itself to the generation of counterfeit doubles? If so, how avoid generating such doubles? Are there what one might call *reserves of God* that are too much for any philosophy of holistic immanence, Hegel's included? Are there any signs in immanence that alert us to the possibility of such reserves? Here are some reflections in conclusion.

Hegel makes us reconsider the question of God and how he answers it. He also forces us to ask how we might differently pose the question and respond. This is a task whose fuller implementation I intend to undertake in *God and the Between*. Whatever else, we need to reconsider the religious matrix in which philosophical thought is grown, and a new mindfulness of what that matrix communicates. I have asked of Hegel, in a variety of ways, whether something is being counterfeited, not only in the religious original, but in the philosophical counterpart claiming to match it conceptually. I have asked about dialectical equivocities in Hegel's putative reconciliation of philosophy and religion, and in the different components of his speculative doctrine of God. I have found Hegel to be as much a victim as a defender of certain typically modern presuppositions about the final incompatibility of divine transcendence and human freedom, relative to which transcendence as other to us must finally be overcome. Despite Hegel's stated intention to 'preserve' religion, he is one of the equivocating signatories of God's death warrant – a warrant summarily, and without equivocation, executed by his successors.

Kierkegaard, typically too, seems to overstate things when he lets Johannes Climacus speak of Hegel as a sign of calamity, like a certain type of fly that appears before the cholera.¹ The more deeply one dwells with Hegel, and the question of God, the more seriously one has to ask if this is an overstatement at all. Judgement here is a most difficult thing. It has not only to do with systematic conceptual coherence but with spiritual finesse about the deepest and highest things. It has to do with crucial factors that are systematically underplayed, or altered, or omitted, in Hegel's speculative concept of God. This is why I think we must speak of the reserves of God. These have an intimate relation to the divine transcendence over and above, and hence reserved, relative to Hegel's understanding. Without these reserves the coin of thought is backed by nothing but itself, which means here by nothing. While claiming to be worth everything relative to the 'god' of holistic immanence, it is worthless relative to God.

When we return to the ontological matrix or ethos wherein being religious and philosophical come to articulation, we come on certain happenings that are 'too much', certain hyperboles of being that occasion, on our part, deep reservations

about claims made for holistic immanence as the last word or the ultimate horizon. More, these reservations suggest something of the very reserve of God as exceeding the terms set by Hegel's speculative dialectic. I will attend to the following: the reserve of the intimate and religious singularity; the reserve of evil and the ultimate 'no'; the reserve of the full and religious community; the reserve of transcendence as exceeding holistic immanence; the reserve of infinity beyond every closed, even self-mediating whole. I cannot but conclude that Hegel lacks speculative finesse, not only for the hyperboles of being, but also God's reserves, and for God beyond the whole.

The Reserve of the Intimate: Religious Singularity Beyond the Homogeneous Universal

Being religious has to do with a community of humans with the divine, but also with a certain singularity that is reserved to, in the sense of being more intimate than, any merely general relation to God. Hegel defines the absolute as 'the identity of identity and difference', and one might wonder if this absolute identity might prove favorable to singularity. Yet Hegel favors less singulars as wholes, relative to which the singularity of the singularity is finally an instantiation of a more inclusive universal.² Singularity in the irreducible sense is allied more with that recalcitrant particularity that wills to stand against the whole, and so it is that very evil speculative dialectic wants to overcome. Or one might say, that there is ultimately only one singular: the concrete universal, or the Whole of wholes. To reach the absolute whole must mean to overcome finite singularity, sacrifice it to the universal. One might call this a 'letting go', or 'surrender' to the true whole, and so it seems like an opening of the singular to the divine, but is it? I give myself over to God, but in this giving over, I come to myself, am at home with myself in a way impossible when I cling to myself. Some currents of deconstructive thought might deride this view, but we need not.³ There is a giving over, and a giving of the self back to itself, in its being given over to what is beyond itself. Hegel grants this too, but the question bears on what one is as giving over, to what one gives oneself, and the character of the giving.

What one is, is not just an instance or particularization of a more encompassing universal, though it may be that too. We are a unique incarnation, a 'world' rich unto itself. There is an idiocy to this singularity that is not absurd but is the non-objectifiable 'that it is'. This is not just its instantiation of a more general form: this is it, and nothing but it; *contra* any dialectical holism, this idiocy is not to be subsumed into a more encompassing whole, which is not to say that it cannot take its place as a participant of a more full community. This is an ontological intimacy to singularity that is, in truth, fulfilled in participation in community, and most of all community with God, but that community and singularity cannot be described in the standard dialectical languages of a more total inclusivity.

The question with religious singularity is not quite the problem we find in Hegel with regard to the overdetermined singularity of the art work. It is even more extreme, in that the living singularity and the radical intimacy of the relation of the singular and God resists fixed determination, or self-determination – which is not

to deny determinacies and self-determinings. Hegel is an heir of the modern subjectification of being, and understands the importance of inwardness – not necessarily in a Kierkegaardian sense, but he does realize that since Greek culture, with Christianity, philosophy and other developments, something of the infinite inwardness of the human self has been opened up. But this opening can be developed in different directions. For instance, there is the *Augustinian*: we move from exterior to interior, and then more importantly, from inferior to superior. Or the *Hegelian*: we move from substance to subject, but with subject we sublate speculatively the difference of human and divine, and hence the asymmetrical relation of inferior and superior is abrogated in the end. There is the *Kierkegaardian*: the turn to infinite inwardness is a turn into ungraspable mystery, and to a relation beyond all finite determination and self-determination, where the difference of inferior and absolutely superior is reinstated. There is the *Nietzschean*: the abyssal nature of the self leads down in a dark source called will to power, or Dionysus, and there is no conceptual grasping of it, nor Christian baptizing of this dark source as God, there is only a dark joyful celebration of a dark power, destructive in creation, creative in destruction.

Despite the many differences here, I would say that we have a diverse recognition of an absolute 'moment' in 'subjectivity' itself – even if the implication is the dissolution, or transcendence of subjectivity understood as autonomously self-determining. If we confine ourselves to Hegel, there is clearly a process of self-mediation through the self's own otherness at work here. It is not inarticulate; and it is crucial for religion, for without it we would have either innocent immediacy, or a kind of inarticulate autism. Hegel's point is the immanence of the absolute, or divine, and while this is not the end of the matter, it is decisive: it will all depend on the process of unfolding the mediation. If I am not mistaken, having granted that, Hegel tends to place the emphasis less on the singularity of the happening of the subject, as on the more universal aspects of logic and the concept and world history. We have seen this with evil, but the point applies generally, in terms of where the most important stress lies.

There are a number of issues here. First, perhaps singularity is more radically intimate to being religion than to any other happening. The most radical form of this intimacy would be the relation of the singular individual and God. In that relation the singular is absolutely irreplaceable, therefore there can be no homogenization of terms, not even a speculative one. We meet a kind of singular absolute that is not necessarily cut off from communication, but in the case of religion is inseparable from the absolute communication itself. This is not a question of singularity versus communicability. Quite to the contrary, the singularity, as this absolute intimacy of being, is the very elemental core of possible communication between this human and the divine. Christianity might be said to be important in emphasizing the relation of the individual and God, but it is doubtful that any religion can avoid this, or does. The point is never the neutralization of this singularity but its intensification in the intimacy of the divine communication. This may have diverse expressions, some tending to the more mystical side, others to the more ethical. But if in either side there is not this singular communication, it is all sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.

My point is not just the Kierkegaardian one, surely itself very important. Kierkegaard is so intent on escaping the Hegelian emphasis on mediation that his

inwardness seems absolutely incommunicable, whereas, in fact, this infinite inwardness is the secret source of communicability in us, and in its most intimate of intimate recesses the elemental communication with the divine is offered. Nor is it enough just to call it an immediacy, or to call the heart an immediacy and then go on (as Hegel does, sometimes subtly, sometimes crudely) to relativize this negatively as a mere indefiniteness that must be lifted up to the more universal, and hence public level. I agree that the more than individual is very important, but there is more to the intimate and the heart than an empty indefinite feeling. There is the overdetermination, the 'too much', of the singularity in the recess of the intimacy of being. The soul is too much even for itself, but its too muchness is not only its own. Nietzsche might agree with Augustine when he exclaimed: *grande profundum est ipse homo*. The quarrel between them is the interpretation of this *profundum*, this abyss. Is it the bottomless opening to the living God, trusted even in the valley of death, or the dark chaos whence Dionysian energies mysteriously stream? In some respects, Nietzsche's odyssey in the dark Dionysian chaos is closer to the God beyond the whole than Hegel's speculative holism. It requires, so to say, more vigor of spirit, and in that is closer to the absolute intensive vigor asked by the God beyond holistic immanence.

There is self-mediation here, Hegel is right, of course; and there is self-mediation through the other. The intimate communicability requires this also; otherwise, it tends to remain in more formless self-communication. Though this autism of being is not what it is, the promise of its own fuller self-becoming is not woken without the call of the other. The issue: who, or what is the needed other, and its status? Is it the owned other: self-mediation in and through an other that is one's own? Or self-mediation through an other, whose otherness is never to be termed one's own? If the former we can close the circle, if the latter we cannot: we are in a different middle space, where the exit towards the other demands a mediation beyond self-mediation, and one which may not necessarily lead back to a more completed self-mediation. Hegel dominantly thinks in terms of the first possibility, hence the communicability beyond self of the self, as well as the self-communication of the self, each seems a different form of the same more inclusive self-mediation through the other. Putting aside for the moment the intermediation with the other, I ask if the self-mediation, considered purely as such, can be so described. Can self-mediation through its own otherness fully be described just as self-mediation? Otherwise put, can the singular self so mediate with itself that what is implicit in itself can be brought to full explicitness, in principle; or is there an inward otherness, even in the most intensive self-mediation, without which the self-mediation would not be possible, but which itself cannot be fully self-mediated?

Why ask the question thus? Because if we are talking about the *infinite inwardness* of self, there is this immanent otherness which is most intimate to the self and yet is not owned by self, and can never be. Its most intimate being is other to its own self-possession; something exceeds self-mediation, this inward infinity, even in the most intensive of self-mediations. I call attention to this, since Hegel seems to be proceeding in this direction, in his appropriation of Christianity, but then at the end he veers off, veers off because he wants to close the circle of self-mediation rather than allowing, in a kind of Augustinian granting, that an abyss of the divine opens up here in the immanence of otherness that will always exceed any logic of self-mediation through

owned otherness, no matter how speculatively comprehensive. This latter logic, in claiming to comprehend, simply misses the point of what is coming to manifestation here: exceeding self-mediating, exceeding self-determining knowing, exceeding intermediating also. The mystery of the divine in the immanence of self needs here a different kind of thinking: more meditative, more existential, a mindfulness willing to listen to the signs communicated by great art, and more purified in the discernments of the holy. We come across not only an ungraspable abyss, but our being is in a radically equivocal milieu of the spirit: the self not as the confident speculative reader of the signs of the divine; the self as itself the most deeply equivocal being, in need of an interpretation it cannot effect completely through itself alone. For it is the question, it is in question, and as a question to itself, it is a question it cannot answer for itself, or be the complete answer for itself.

The radical equivocality of the living human being shows it as the singular place where the play between curse and blessing, perdition and redemption is offered and effected. A system cannot do justice to what is at stake here: the ultimate perplexity, the mystery of life itself. I mean here also that to risk the adventure of reading the equivocal signs does not predetermine the outcome, say, between the Augustinian and the Nietzschean. This is the question of a mindful life, not just an argument. I am not saying system is not important, for it is *very important* to plot systematically the intricacies of what is here at stake, in so far as they bring us to the limit of system. System mediates mindfulness of the boundary of system. System is important, but on this limit, the audacity of the religious solicitation is on the boundary of philosophy, and the philosopher needs the humility to grant that he cannot arrogate to himself the undisputed power of responding to it. Such an arrogation would already be a response that does not respond to the difference of the situation, to the singularity of what happens on this boundary. What is wanted here is a different poverty of philosophy: not faith seeking understanding, but understanding risking response to the summons calling it beyond itself. This 'beyond' itself is a darkness, or dazzle, where the 'yes' to God is hyperbolically tested beyond univocal and dialectical adjudication. This 'yes', like the last judgement, does not lie with speculative dialectic.

The Reserve of Evil and the Ultimate 'No': On Letting and God's Patience

What of evil? Does this not bring us to an ultimate 'no', or nihilation, and this in the milieu of radical equivocality of spirit? We have seen how the connection of evil and particularity is important for Hegel. I connect it with the idiocy of the monstrous. We are addressing the intimacy of self-being itself, dealing with 'immanence', but it is evident that from the depths of this immanence arises the shocking perplexity about evil that exceeds immanence: something in immanence too much for immanence. We might even follow partly the same path as Hegel but we see differently what shows itself, see what his speculative dialectic does not allow us to see, or makes us squint at. The milieu of radical equivocality is where we find ourselves, and while the difference of evil and good comes to expression there, there are excessive equivocities here that resist both determinacy and self-determining, and they have everything to do with religion.

An example: the event of *temptation*. Temptation is very hard to plot on any logic of determination or self-determination, even though it does deal with the openness of freedom; temptation addresses the will in a strange in-between state.⁴ Here also the play of counterfeit doubles becomes most intractable, and the discernment of these is doubtfully containable within any system. The evil appears as good, and the evil is chosen as good, and this in more than one sense. The discerning of the difference between an original and its counterfeit double, here not only exceeds structure, but also self-structuring.

I illustrate from Hegel. Consider the structure of mutual recognition that Hegel gives in his *Phenomenology*: each seeks to recognize itself in the other, and in turn to be recognized by the other. My point: this self-same structure could be as true of *mutual hatred* as of *mutual love*. Mutual love: I seek to be loved in loving the other; the other seeks to be loved in loving me; we love each other and find ourselves in that love, and may even 'let each other go' in that. Mutual hatred: I seek to be loved by the other, but find I hate the other because I cannot force from them their recognition of me; the other seeks to be loved by me but finds it hates me because he or she cannot force from me my recognition of them; at a limit, we 'let each other go' as beyond forcing, but this 'letting go' is from the 'no' of hatred, or disgust, or despair, rather than from the 'yes' of love and delight. The 'letting go' of mutual hatred is a double of the 'letting go' of mutual love. But the structure, dialectical structurings, of mutual love and mutual hatred might well be *the same*, but they would be *opposites that could not be described in terms of the speculative unity of any coincidence of opposites*. In the same pattern of structuring relation, the energy of being, in one instance, would be malign, in the other instance, benign. The energy of being would circulate in opposite directions in the self-same structure of mutual self-recognition, but the difference of mutual hatred and love would be total. And nothing in Hegel's way of thinking draws attention to the need of a further mindful discernment, informed by love, to differentiate the two. We are dealing with samenesses that, at one level, look absolutely the same, but the energy of spirit is absolutely different and there is no way to reduce to one, this absolute sameness and absolute difference.

The most revealing example of this refers us to the anti-Christ. Anti-Christ looks exactly like the Christ, hence the sameness, but in the sameness there is an absolute difference; and it is an absolute difference on the heights, at the level of the absolute itself. And there is nothing in Hegel's self-mediation in and through the other that allows for the discernment of this difference. This difference too has to do with the absolutely singular. It has to do also with the discerning of the difference of perdition and salvation.

One could argue indeed that there is no *problem* of evil, in the sense of a determinate difficulty that has its correlative solution. There is something about evil that is in the dimension of the hyperbolic; and hence, if there is a 'solution' to it, it must also be hyperbolic. Beyond determinacy, it is kind of negative overdeterminacy, the malign mimicry of the overdeterminacy of the surplus good. As such it must also exceed self-determination, since if the issue were only one of self-determination, the answer to this question would be the same as the question, the savior and the saved are one. But this would be nonsense, for the one to be saved knows the dimensions of the evil to be such that it cannot save itself completely

through itself alone. This is why the 'problem' of evil here correlates with salvation, and with no determinate solution to a problem. The very nature of salvation indicates, in the hyperbolic character of the evil at stake, that there is no self-saving.

Of course, if your logic is like Hegel's, you may be tempted by two possibilities which emphasize self-determination, hence self-saving. Either *humanity* is saving itself from itself as problem: the hand that inflicts the wound is the hand that heals it; then salvation lies completely within the self-determining powers of humanity. If my argument is right, this is to counterfeit the notion of salvation, and to falsify the hyperbolic nihilation of evil which just as such exceeds humanistic resources. Alternatively, and granting something about the defect of this first possibility, one might say still: the hand that inflicts also heals the wound but this is spirit, and spirit here is the divine spirit. This divine spirit is proportional to the evil, there is nothing disproportionate, since the inflicting and healing hand are the *same*; hence salvation is the divine self-determination. God determines the solution, as himself, in determining himself. But note that God is then as much the source of the evil as the source of the salvation: God and the evil are the same. And is not an evil God a counterfeit double, a malign genius that mimics the good?

Or if you say, one aspect of God is evil, another more inclusive one is good, and this latter is the source of salvation, the fact is you still make salvation a matter of *self-salvation*. God is not saving humanity *simpliciter*, rather *God is saving himself*. God then becomes the 'problem' of which he also claims to be the 'solution'. Then one has to ask: what manner of God can this be that is given over, that gives itself over to the production of the immense desolation of evil. Our salvation is not only an eternal justification of evil as divine, but it casts a slur on God, whether as evil or a redeeming. Who could worship a stupid, evil God like that? Could one even pity such a 'God'? But when one has seen the faces of evil in finite creation, and if they serve as mediations for this pitiable absolute to absolve itself, become reconciled with itself, one demurs, one turns away. This 'God' has no right to forgive himself. And if he forgives himself, he is not God. There is here a counterfeit double of God, and hence our turning away is no blasphemy, but a turning towards a different God.

Consider this third possibility. You might slide dialectically *between* spirit as self-determining humanity and the self-determining God. But this might merely increase the confusion of the equivocity of evil. Now you seem to talk as if humanity is redeemed by God, and there is a genuine saving other. But then you slide away from this, if the self-determining power of humans is called into question, as it must be, if there is an other saving power. And then again you can speak of God's own self-reconciliation, but one way or another the essential difference of the human and the divine has been blurred, and we have a kind of cross-eyed squinting at the very exigence of salvation that is the agony and glory of being religious. The blurring will be presented as saving, but it merely continues the radical equivocity that the question of evil and salvation itself addressed. Here we have again a dialectical equivocity: a dialectic that seems speculatively to sublimate an equivocity, while in fact it intensifies it, and hides the fact that it intensifies and reproduces it. For it claims that its reduplication of the problem is the solution, but it is only a counterfeit double of the answer.

Hegel insists again and again on *knowing* as saving. What kind of knowing is this? Philosophical knowing? But this is not to do justice to what salvation means

for being religious. It is not speculative system, though speculative theology need not be disparaged; it is the transfigured relation of the human to the divine; and this is a living, not just a knowing; it is a new love; and if the new love is a knowing, it is not captured by system. Hegel equivocated between his version of philosophical knowing and religious salvation. To know as Hegel understands knowing is not an answer to the 'problem' of evil, understood as the need for salvation. This can only come from God; and even to understand that is still not to be saved. There is no 'self-elevation' here. An entirely different metanoia is asked in the very roots of the intimate idiot, and in the enactment of the metanoia in a life of ethical service, of agapeic service, and indeed philosophical service, but not one in the services of the counterfeit sophia of speculative gnosis.

Hegel is, of course, right to emphasize that being religious is inseparable from some knowing of God, but the issue both for the philosopher and the religious person is what kind of knowing this is, whether standard forms of philosophical knowing, even claims to speculative knowing, do it justice at all. These forms can serve it, but if they substitute themselves for it, they do not serve it. One wonders at Hegel's proclaimed Lutheranism here relative to grace and works. Everything about Hegel shows a philosophy of work, and not grace. The historical self-becoming of humanity is one of works: works of *Geist* no doubt, but *Geist* in which finally there is nothing gratuitous, and excessive – nothing but its own self-determination. Indeed the logic of dialectical self-determination through the owned other is modelled on work – the labour of the negative. Work shows a dialectical self-mediation in and through the other.

Marx was not altogether wrong when he said Hegel grasped the self-creation of historical humanity but mystified his intent in religious form: the self-creation of humanity, in which finally there is no grace, nothing given at all, which we do not give to ourselves. Any transformation here works on the reconstruction of otherness as the self-other. Worked others are the mirrors in which historical humanity recognizes itself again and hence overcomes the alienation. If there is self-transformation here it is not the transformation implied by salvation: this is not working at self-becoming, for the self in becoming needs to re-created. Its being given its being anew is the advent of grace in it, the renewed power of its 'to be', given from the most ultimate power. Creation, and re-creation, are given by the God beyond the whole. Re-creation involves the absolving offer, opening again a new beginning. And because of the rupture between the old and new creation, this 'being re-made' cannot be fully worked out in terms of self-creation, self-making. If there are continuities between creation and re-creation, it is the promise of the good of the 'to be' in the first instance that finds its promise renewed. This promise we do not first produce, though we do participate in its redemption or betrayal.

Betrayal asks for forgiveness, and this is forgiveness, namely, the renewal of this promise. One cannot renew it alone, for the promise is itself first a gift, the first gift, hence the renewal is the giving again of the first gift: the good of the 'to be' as the promise of the good of the 'to be'. The good 'to be' – what we are to be. Hence transformation means ethical and religious service in relation to the good of self and other. The form of transformation, as already being defined in relation to the ultimate other as ultimate, is enacted as service of the other. Just as the transformation is not just self-transformation, the self transformed, the self re-created, is not

defined by self-determination, but marked by freedom beyond this. This is the seed of a new willingness that may flower into a purer form of agapeic service of the neighbor. The crucial relation to the other as giving transforms salvation from any form of self-transforming self-determination. The difference of the relation is enacted in the worldly form of community that follows.

What then of *radical* evil? Speculative dialectic deals with the equivocality of evil and good in terms of more and more inclusive wholes: these 'redeem' the refractoriness or fragmentation of the less inclusive parts. The absolute Whole of wholes, the One that includes all resistant others, will 'sublate' the equivocality. It may be true, in a qualified sense, that from the standpoint of a larger whole certain evils are relativized as evil. The death of the lamb is evil for the lamb but good for the wolf; relative to the good of a more encompassing ecological community, this death can be relativized as an evil, for clearly it serves a good, indeed may be the necessary condition of another good. Good comes out of evil: an evil relative here is necessary for a good relative there. This seems immanent in the equivocality of evil: by an ontological irony it contributes to the furtherance of its opposite. But can this be made the truth of the 'whole', as Hegelian theodicy suggests? In the so-called 'aesthetic theodicy', the whole is compared to a painting whose beauty is not evident to those in the painting, especially to us, over there in that corner of brooding, full of foreboding and sinister suspicion. To the God on a par with the whole, the whole itself is good. What of the darkness that thickens about us? Are there evils that are irreparable nihilations, at least relative to any power we can conceive? Are there losses of the good that even God cannot *dialectically* redeem? Is there radical evil such that, even in the good of the whole, even granting that, its horror is not dispelled? Such radical evil would be at the edge of all mediation, whether dialectical or otherwise. Must God be such as to let such radical evils be, just in their transcendence of mediation? What is this 'letting be', this divine forbearance? Is it the reserve of an unsurpassable, and to us incomprehensible, *patience*?

Where do we find this reserve of God's patience in Hegel? For this patience is *not* Hegel's cunning of reason (*List der Vernunft*). Everything about this reserve of patience points to a transcendence beyond holistic immanence. It is hyperbolic to the resources of immanence, and so speaks more of the unsurpassable mystery of the God beyond the whole. If there is an approach to radical evil, it cannot be just a dialectical one, since what is here in play is not assimilable to a logic of inclusive self-mediation in and through the other. Is there not an idiotic monstrosity to radical evil that shatters the pretension of speculative mediation? Evil that mediation cannot then dialectically recover in its essential good? An equivocality of the evil that resists being unknotted, for the truth of this knot is just that it would not be unknotted, it would that it were an eternal knot, eternally turned in a posture of 'not' to the goodness of the source? 'Evil be thou my good' – so says Milton's Satan. And the origin lets this be as other, and in a way that is *not* the origin's own self-othering. Is this letting of evil – for free love cannot force the other – a communication of a divine reserve?

The Reserve of the Full and Religious Community

I made some suggestions in the last chapter about pluralized dialectic in relation to an understanding of community which cannot be captured in the logic of more inclusive self-mediating wholes. As I put it, the intermediation between self-mediating beings cannot itself be just a more inclusive self-mediation, for this will do no justice to the following: the reserve beyond self-mediation in each partner in communication; the excess of the space of openness between these self-mediating partners, enabling an intermediation beyond their self-mediation; the transcending energies of the lines of communication between these partners which, as exceeding self-mediation, constitute communication, but which also communicate not exhausted reserves of the sources out of which determinate communications come to be expressed. Community shows a certain plurivocally qualified togetherness of excessive plenitudes: too much in the speaker, too much in the addressee, too much in the communication between them; the too much enabling self-communication of all and other-communication to each, but reserved as more, even in the richest of determinate communications. We must think community as overdeterminate, and in terms of the reserve of the full.

One might see this as bound up with the pluralisms of religions. Does the divine manifest itself in a plurivocal showing that, while self-communicative, cannot be gathered into the holistic immanence of one speculative whole? If God were the agapeic One, its plurivocal showing would exceed every mediation in immanence, every philosophical mediation, even every religious mediation. Monotheism could not be monism. It would be potentially idolatrous to insist that the pluralisms of religions be reduced to one form, even one supposedly consummated form said to sublate all the essentials of the many. There is more than a mono-dialectic-speculation leading to Hegel's version of Christianity. We must be free beyond both the univocalization of the agapeic God, as well as the speculative holism, for each of these immanently domesticates transcendence as other. Let God be God, in the excess of the hyperbolic, for only God is God. One needs a new catholicity here: a new universalism that is not immanently holistic but serves a monotheism that no one owns. A universalism served in the agapeic service beyond the univocalism which claims God as 'mine', and the holistic mutual determination which claims God as 'ours'. No one owns God, not speculative system, not any religion either. Whatever one claims thus to own is owned only as a counterfeit double.

This relates to the spirit, and its listing where it will. Is this listing the *List der Vernunft*? I do not think so. To reason as absolutely self-determining, there is something anarchic in this listing. It may possibilize a pluralized dialectic but is beyond every such dialectic. Its very possibilizing is its immanence in them as beyond their immanence. Think of Francis of Assisi's anarchic kiss of the leper: it is beyond any law of one-to-one correlation, it is beyond mutual determination or recognition. Asymmetrical in the fullness of its generosity, it exceeds life that clings to itself alone, life that determines itself alone. Thus one could speak of the reserve of the full in the community of agapeic service in its being beyond the form of self-mediation in and through the other. In this community singularity as closed back into itself is coaxed open and can become communicative self-transcendence. Of course, Hegel speaks also of giving oneself over, and 'giving up' finite

particularity. Everything hangs on the character of the giving over and the giving up. To what is one given over? Hegel: I give myself over to the inclusive whole. But what is that whole? Is it really on a par with either the singularity of self, or the community between selves? There seems highest nobility in giving oneself over to 'the whole', but is this to give oneself over to God? One might be giving oneself over to a 'whole' ontologically deficient with regard to both the infinite richness of singular persons, and the community of love between them. The divine other to whom we are given over is as much a question as the I that gives itself over. Giving oneself over to a whole beyond the human and divine (representationally understood) might be flight from singularity, and the community of love rather than fulfilling the promise of human transcendence. There is a death of singularity in holistic immanence that would do away, not only with the suffering of singularity but also its highest flower – flourishing as this astonishing personal being.⁵ The two partners of the giving over, self and other, have to be articulated in their togetherness, doing justice to both, to the reserves of human singularity, and the reserves of the divine other that communicates and remains in mystery.

For there are different communications, reflecting different ways of being given over. Some accentuate the self-affirmation of the being communicating itself: I give myself over and really I am giving myself to myself again, for I never really let go. This can be swaddled in the sweetest language of surrender and care for the other, but the secret is still me and mine, my and myself, and nothing but me and mine. If we use this self-communicative language for God, there is no real giving over. The giving over may be erotic: there is communication towards the other, but in finding the other, the communication still communicates with itself. The other to whom one gives oneself, lets one be given back to oneself. This giving serves less the other than a different fulfilment of self. It is not necessarily hostile to the other, but it is not beyond the self-absorbed circle of the God or humanity at home with itself. We can speak of mutual recognition, but if we look up from the dynamics of this to the vision of the whole situating it, we see that community here is still absorbed in a more and more inclusive self-communication. In this case too the asymmetry of the full in the reserve of its communication nowhere has a place. This is Hegel: whether the self-communication of God in God's immanent being; of God's self-communication in creation, or in history; or indeed in the community of spirit said to be God's full present in holistic immanence. This is still all self-communication, when we lift our eyes up from the appearance of plurality in the middle to the overreaching whole that includes all.

Being agapeic is a different giving over, and when we see this as communicative being, there is a reserve to the giving source even when it gives out of its excess and for the sake of what is truly beyond itself. This applies to God's self, as we have tried to suggest relative to the trinitarian self-communication of God immanent to God; to the release of creation into its otherness as finitude for itself; to God as partner in the historical equivocality of good and evil, and the communication of the surplus good needed to save the goodness of creation from the evil that would undo it; to God as beyond the community of erotic sovereignty that finally doubles in Hegel's vision of spiritual community for the community of agapeic service. The hyperbolic full is always excess, whether in its communication of itself and to what is other, or in terms of what remains reserved as absolute surplus even in its self-

communication. No Hegelian logic of holistic immanence, whether applied to the eternal self-immanence of God's community with self, or to the communication between God and finite immanence, can do justice to this paradoxical excessive reserve and resource: source that cannot be depleted in being communicated, for its being is surplus good. But this makes its communication absolutely unique, and that is why we cannot really comprehend it. This means that there is a hiddenness and incognito to this excess in the finite between also. It escapes us as we try to determine it, or define it as self-determining community.

With regard to humans, the further giving of agapeic service finds itself in the welcome of the other as other. If we still seek ourselves, we find that the other communicates that the absolutization of self-seeking not only will not find the other properly, but will not find self. This is a giving over of self not for self-finding, but for being with the other, and no demand is made that the other give one back oneself. This granting is in excess to mutual self-recognition. This agapeic self-transcending asks us to have regard for the other in the light of the promise of its participation in the agape of being. Since dialectic tends to give prominence to erotic self-transcendence, we need another way to deal with agapeic being. Is being given, or being given over agapeically, impossible without divine reserve? Hegel is not at all comfortable with this reserve. It eludes every worldly immanence, even while possibilizing immanent communities. It is in the world but not of it, but Hegel will have none of this since it would seem too close to a putative equivocation he thinks his speculative dialectic has transcended – not to anything divine not of the world, but transcended to the world of holistic immanence.

Is agapeic community 'beyond' holistic immanence while in its midst? If so it would be metaxological in the double sense of the *metaxu*: in the midst, but also over and above. What would be the 'over and above' that possibilizes this community in the midst? Would it not be the God beyond the whole whose reserve of asymmetrical fullness possibilizes, in the between, in the midst, transcendent community in a hyperbolic sense? And does not this issue bear on the nature of Hegel's saving knowing? If knowing saves it must be a *knowing that loves*, or finds itself loved. Love and logic may be ultimately connected, but there are different forms of love, and logic may look different depending on which of the loves is understood as ultimate. Hegel, I said, blurs the needed differentiations. He cannot be let off with just saying that his concept is more ultimate than love, if love secretly infiltrates his understanding of the concept. A different sense of love would yield a different sense of thinking, say of an agapeic mindfulness, not just an erotic, hence put under strain his version of the concept. In what true sense can Hegel's God love, and in what sense could one *pray* to Hegel's God, once having made the speculative surpassing to philosophy as absolute knowing? The others will continue to pray to God, and to love, but the Hegelian philosophers will know, and know beyond love and prayer. If love is a knowing, it is one that never exhausts the overdeterminacy of the other loved. If praying is a love that knows God, or is known by God, then it lives a communicative porosity between God and us that could not be exhausted by a knowledge either fully determinate, or claiming to be fully self-determining. Such claims would falsify this religious knowing, this porosity, this loving, this praying. Prayer is the friend of a paradoxical poverty of philosophy that loves the reserve of the full. This living of philosophy has no place to lay its

head in Hegel's system, because it has become philosophy besides itself, philosophy beyond itself. It has become as a child, and its being touched by an idiot wisdom makes it wake up to the idol of reason that claims complete self-determining power.

The Reserve of Transcendence: Exceeding Holistic Immanence

I refer to what I called third transcendence (T3) at the beginning of this book. If we speak of a reserve of transcendence that exceeds holistic immanence, is it inevitable that we become fixed in a position of dualistic opposition? One of the undoubted attractions of Hegel's speculative dialectic is its confrontation with and effort to surpass the dualisms dogging modernity since Descartes, and perhaps the metaphysical-theological tradition since 'Plato'. It may well be that the temptation to dualism in some sense is inevitable in that religion relates to the 'more', the 'excess' of the divine, and the natural human tendency is to think of this as 'above', as over and above. Then too it is just as natural a human propensity to univocalize this 'above', this 'more', and thus to fix it 'over there', as a kind of determinate other – catatonic eternity, God 'objectivized', or whatever. That this tendency is understandable does not mean it does justice to the fullness of the ontological situation, not only with references to excesses revealed in the midst of immanence, such as we touched on above, but to the intimations and communications that there is more than immanence, and that immanent givenness would be nothing, were it not communicated to be by an origin other to it. If this other origin is *hyper*-origin relative to immanent givenness, we need not fix its being '*hyper*' as a dualistic opposite. The univocal spatialization of transcendence has often had the effect of falsifying the energies of transcendence, and also of the interplays between what is given, and what is giving, what is created and what is creating. I would say a good use of dialectic is to undo, or open up, this univocal spatialization of transcendence. It opens up the dynamisms of transcending, the interplays and relating in the between, and indeed senses of sameness and otherness that cannot be fixed in univocal determinacy, or immanent self-determinations.

I think something of this was known by premodern practitioners of dialectic. In modernity the dialectical release from falsifying fixations is itself fixed on *immanence itself* as holistic self-determination. It is not a release to transcendence as other. Hegel represents the speculative culmination of this fixation. There is an interplay of same and other, this interplay reveals the energy of being, and it is more than this or that, and as such is transcending, self-surpassing. But this interplay is not with a spatialized beyond, univocally fixed over there: it is 'within' immanence itself, and therein the play of same and other is the play of immanence with itself. The otherness of this immanence is its own otherness; its transcendence is its own self-transcendence; there is no transcendence as other to its own self-transcendence. Dialectic then becomes a matter of the self-mediation of immanence in and through its own otherness. Immanence becomes itself more fully in appropriating its *own* 'more'. In totally mediating its own excess, it constitutes itself as the absolute whole. That is not determinate being, but self-determining being. The univocal spatialization which fixes transcendence as an other beyond must be radically undone. Then 'all in all', immanence is fixed on its own self-determining, and there

is no release to any radically other transcendence. Beyond dualism, we have the absolute circle of self-transcendence which circles around itself in its own otherness, giving itself to itself.

Sometimes, as I mentioned before, Hegel uses the language of the 'middle' (for example, *Glauben und Wissen*, GW 4, 329, 338–9, 344), and significantly so, since his whole philosophy is one of mediation. I ask again: what kind of middle is this? We can see lucidly that ultimately it is never a middle between something and another, where the difference between one and the other is an irreducible otherness. If it is an 'absolute middle', it shows itself finally as a middle *between the absolute and itself*. Even when a relation between God and the world is granted, finally it is an absolute self-relation, absolved from any irreducible other. Everything is within this 'absolute middle' as the Whole of wholes. This 'absolute middle' is the absolute self-mediation of the absolute.

Further still, even granting that Hegel grants a relative being to finite creation, the final truth is that there is *no ultimate between other than the One mediating with itself*. Anything resembling what I would call the finite between in the metaxological sense is absorbed or blurred into the dialectical One, as indeed is the sense of the broken middle between God and creation that we find in Pascal's understanding of the space between finitude and infinity. Though there might seem to be a between in Hegel, it begins to look more like a dialectical-speculative double of the middle, as humans know it from their dwelling in finitude. Hegel's speculative One looks like a dialectical double of the God of creation, the God of biblical transcendence as beyond the whole, but the reserve of that transcendence has been emptied of its otherness.

Reservation: how could this be, if this other transcendence is to be described in the language of the reserve of the full? As overfull it could never be emptied. It could not be mapped on any self-becoming that completes itself by transcending from initial lack to self-mediating wholeness. Transcendence itself: an otherness reserved for God alone, and more than all holistic immanence. If all we can do is redescribe this reserved otherness as a sublated moment of a more encompassing whole, this way of immanence immanentizes transcendence itself. This holistic immanence itself then lacks the ability to see divine otherness in terms other than dualistic opposition. If transcendence as transcendence resists completely immanent mediation, perhaps that resistance is a sign, not of its dialectical unintelligibility, but of the limit of dialectical intelligibility and its immanent way. Transcendence is shown and reserved, and so it appears on, and forbears beyond, the unfixed boundary between mediation and mystery. The mystery is violated when wrongly mediated; the full intermediation is contracted when wrongly immanentized. Even if we sympathize with the intent of Hegel's dialectical reminder of the *togetherness* of God and world, this togetherness is wrongly articulated without the very different reminder of God's transcendence, even in togetherness itself. The otherness of the divine is other to any otherness immanentized in Hegel's holistic self-mediation. This other otherness is the 'beyond', but in no merely derisory sense of a heteronomy that tyrannizes over finite life. It may be a *heteros* absolutely necessary for there to be any self-transcendence, self-mediation, any autonomy in immanence, in the finite between.

If this other otherness communicates of the reserve of God, and if our granting of *some* togetherness of the human and divine disrespects that otherness, or disregards

this reserve, we invite a new 'higher' univocalism in which we say the human 'is' the divine, the divine 'is' human. Despite claims made about the inner complexity of this 'is', we are tempted to override the absolute qualification of the indispensable otherness. Either the human is swallowed up in the divine as an all-devouring absorbing god; or the divine is interiorized by the human, and the human declares itself as the one, true and holy absolute of history. Mystical absorption has not been to the tastes of modern man, who wills his own autonomy, but the second option has been chosen in a variety of atheistic forms. The choice is really the result of our being victimized by, or the willing victims of, the equivocality of a dialectic that is still itself victim to univocity. We have paid the price for this dialectical equivocality with Hegel's atheistic heirs: atheistic univocity that violates the difference of human and divine in its hyperbolic promotion of the human as the One.

This equivocality of the dialectical relation to being as other is not unconnected to a more general devaluation of being as other in modernity, against which ostensibly Hegel struggled, but which he continues in his own way. The results of this devaluation include: the loss of the glory of creation; the deformation of creation and the hinder to thinking the agapeic origin; the compensating elevation of human autonomous self-determination; the deformation of religion into self-elevation, and the subtler truth of religious reverence and humility cast into the outer darkness; the source of value in otherwise valueless nature attributed alone to the human being. In Hegel we find the devalued otherness of the earth leading to an absolute spirit that itself leads to a strange spiritlessness; to the self-absolutizing of self-determination, and the irritable hostility to traces of another transcendence as other to us; to, in the extreme, the occlusion of a sense of freedom needed to do justice to that other transcendence, and our being released beyond autonomy. All of these betoken not only a loss of God, but also a loss of finesse for agapeic service, coupled with mimics of this absolute transcendence in immanence, and mimics of this agapeic service.

All this is only visible from a position beyond speculative dialectic where also the univocal spatialization of the 'beyond' is interpreted differently. (Beyond! Beyond! – you accuse me of fetishizing God as an 'object'. No, no – I do not. If you insist I do, that to me is an index of your fetishizing the 'beyond', of your lack of religious imagination.) There is always the danger of a misleading fixation of differences, yes. But if these differences are full of equivocities that cannot be dialectically *aufgehoben*, we require metaxologically mindfulness that keeps the differences as differences open. They are the middle spaces possibilized by creation as giving to be; middle spaces through which the promise of finite beings is redeemed or betrayed; middle spaces where also the self-fulfillment of beings is enacted in ethical community with other beings and in religious communication with the divine source. The middle spaces are hyperbolic: overdeterminate beyond self-determination: there are the occasions that awake our reverence and astonishment for what is even more than they; finite mystery, infinite mystery.

Hegel, I have said, reverts to univocity but at the speculative level. In truth, the great power of religion is to keep us safe from this highest idolatry by keeping open the difference – for this difference is not the self-othering of the human, nor is it the self-othering of the divine, but is invitation to the communication between the human and divine. It is not the self-othering of the divine, for creation is not that

self-othering but the free release of finitude into its own being for itself, and good as other. It is not the human self-othering, for we do not project ourselves in this middle space when being genuinely religious. Rather we are drawn beyond into a between above ourselves, by a love knowing it must empty itself of its self-insistence, making way for the open space into which the communication of prayer is sent. If there is an immanence of God in prayer, I am not convinced Hegel has the right words to describe it. Quite the opposite, everything remains systematically equivocal, even though he thinks that this is just the overcoming of equivocality. It is as if he hits on many of the strains of the ambiguous between, but mixes up his partial enumeration of equivocality with its overcoming. This again is a dialectical equivocality whose claim to solve an equivocality in fact embodies it such that it cannot be even addressed on its terms, hence hiding also this dialectical equivocation from honest view.

The dialectical equivocality is very evident in the privileging of a logic of erotic self-origination from indeterminacy to self-determination rather than a logos that seeks to speak the overdetermination of the origin as agapeic. This hyperbole of the origin is suggested by a different ontology of the love of being as good. The love of the 'to be' as good, from the origin, communicates something of the excessive reserve of God. Hegel's holistic immanence means that any mystery in the origin must be dialectically displaced as a process of determination becomes complete in a teleology of self-determination, the end of which is the conceptual conquest of God's reserves.

It also tempts us with a progressivism smug about earlier peoples as sunk in superstitious wonder. Struck by wonders, they are taken in, in thrall to the indefiniteness of their ignorance. Their wonder, we say, is their deficiency, not spontaneous admiration of the reserved divinity. Correlatively, mystery is the token of their *not understanding*. Religious infantilism, we say then, must be progressively overcome by more and more rational determination. As it turns out, this move from the 'primitive' to the 'advanced' means the relativization of the religious and its enfeeblement. We preen ourselves, since we think we stand at the end of the progress, come of age. How many times have we heard this? Behind us, the indefiniteness of beginnings; before us, ourselves, as we determine ourselves; beneath us, all the reserves of God that we demand declare themselves, for otherwise we squander treasures on heaven we should rather spend on earth. And above us? Finally, nothing.

Hegel, of course, will sing of the whole, all the while defending the need to determine the indefiniteness that bogs us down in the nebulous. Well and good, yet there can be a disastrous oversight in this will to self-determination that mistakenly thinks the absolute teleology moves from the indefinite to the determinate, or from the definite to the self-determining. There may be more to the origin, and an other purpose. As overdetermined, not merely indeterminate, origin may be the hyperplenitude, the surplus good out of which everything definite, and even every definite lack, is allowed to arise. This overdetermination may be prior to, yet companion, even while exceeding every stage of determination, from beginning through middle to end, and to it there is no determinate or self-determining completion, for if it communicates purpose, this purpose is beyond finite purposiveness, and thus too would be hyperbolic.

One might admire the immanent whole, but can one adore it? Short of the wonder of fullness itself, of overfull goodness reserved for the hidden God, short of this reserved goodness that gives out of its transcendence the possibilities of the finite and determinate, short of this, is any 'God' God, is any 'God' a God one could worship, or love?

The Reserve of the Infinite: God Beyond the Whole

Needless to say, Hegel has his doctrine of infinitude: 'The infinite is ... the self-sublation of [the one-sided] infinite and finite, as a *single* process – this is the *true* or *genuine infinite*.'⁶ But suppose there is an overdeterminacy to infinitude that is reserved to, beyond, all determination or self-determination in the terms of any immanent holism? If we give the primacy to holistic immanence, will we not counterfeit this reserve? Hegel's genuine infinite is not 'over against' the finite; rather it sublates the finite as a negative moment of its own self-mediating, and, note well, 'as a *single* process', defines the absolute whole whose self-circling motion joins beginning and end. Hegel's thinking of the infinite circles round and round itself, captivated to the circle of circles, speculatively intoxicated thought thinking itself in and as the immanent whole. This speculative dialectic of the absolutely self-mediating whole has no patience for divine infinity as overdetermined and as transcending all wholes. Hegel's God as the Whole of wholes includes all subordinate wholes; the togetherness of finite and infinite in their dialectical interplay is within the self-mediating whole. But if God is beyond the whole, a different sense of infinitude is implied that, in its overdetermined excess, remains in reserve relative to holistic immanence.

Are there signs of this in immanence, communications in finitude which intimate in immanence what exceeds holistic immanence? One might argue that the finitude of creation, in its being given to be at all, points less to its sublation in Hegel's whole, as to the reserved difference of divine infinitude as exceeding the terms of holistic immanence. Finite creation might be called an open whole: open, in receiving being, as given to be; whole, as given being for itself; open also, in intimating its hyper-origin in what is beyond any immanent whole.

Our own being as centers of finite self-transcendence, albeit infinitely restless (T2), might itself be said to exceed the terms of holistic immanence. We are not just self-mediating wholes, but infinitely beyond ourselves in our being in relativity to everything other. As integrities of self-mediating being, potentially we are infinitely self-transcending, hence out beyond ourselves, and hence – and here is the departure from Hegel – not just parts of larger wholes. But our difference is not a vanishing moment in the constitution of something more inclusive. Our infinite restlessness exceeds every holism, oriented to an infinitude exceeding our own. This is neither Hegel's 'bad infinite', nor actual infinitude. It is more an 'intentional infinitude' that surpasses finite beings (T1) and yet is not the measure of its own transcendence (T2). 'Intentional infinitude' is not quite the right word, in so far as 'intentional' carries too much of the *conatus essendi* and not enough of the *passio essendi*. There is (ontological) passion and constitutive ambiguity attached to our infinite restlessness: our 'intention' catches up with this (though never absolutely), as well

as being overtaken by it. This *passio essendi* signifies our disproportion to ourselves, hence source of our infinite restlessness and inadequacy to complete self-possession. But that disproportion and inadequacy points us beyond ourselves, above ourselves to an other infinitude. Our infinite restlessness points above itself to this other infinitude whose difference cannot be abrogated speculatively. Hegel's so-called true infinite is not true to this other infinitude.⁷

Something related is suggested when we consider what a community is, as indicated before. The holistic immanence of the self-mediating whole truncates the singularity of the singular, as well as the otherness of the other. This singularity and community resist absorption without remainder into holistic immanence. The reserve of overdetermined infinitude is hinted at in finitude itself, in terms of certain excesses resistant to self-mediating dialectic, be these excesses the affirmative overdetermination in the being of singularity or the community of being, or the more negative indeterminacy in the happening of evil.

To think in terms of a dialectical-speculative priority of the self-mediating whole over the open infinite, and in a way that is closed to the infinite as over above holistic immanence, is to court atheistic repercussions. The resulting 'unification' of God and humanity, and the reconfigured place of otherness, mean less the mystical absorption of the human into the divine, as the anthropological reduction of the divine to the human. Holistic immanence without transcendence as other so temporalizes transcendence in immanence that the excess of divine infinitude is usurped by the excess of human temporal self-transcending. It generates a kind of *temporal mysticism of the human* as absolute being itself. Thus the legacy of Hegel's dialectical-speculative identification of human and divine is an atheistic humanism which produces the *rupture* of human and divine – *rupture* that mimics in reverse the dualistic postures claimed to be overcome.

This rupture, *subsequent to speculative identification*, takes the form of hostility to the divine in whatever form, but most especially in transcendent form. For that form is the bar to any self-apotheosis of the human being, any absolutizing of the human as untrammelled self-determining being. That bar must be removed. Atheism here is less an intellectual position than a political project or existential demand. There will be no other god but ourselves to remind us of our hubris, now dancing around itself and flattering itself with intoxicating and holy names like 'creativity'. The overdeterminacy of the infinite is claimed for the overdeterminacy of our own otherness which we exalt into the heavens.

You might well protest that Hegel did not intend or allow this rupture of human and God, after identity, rupture due to *reductive* dialectic, such as we find shaping all projective theories of religion.⁸ At one level the protest seems right, but at another level, the protest is evasive. Why? Because *already* Hegel's speculative *elevation* is a *reduction*, just in its evasion of transcendence as other.⁹ The sophisticated speculative dialectic and the cruder reductive dialectic lie on the same spectrum. The rupture of the cruder dialectic is the dark twin of the speculative identity of God and man. What we have dialectically-speculatively reconstructed, be it humanity, or holistic immanence, is the false double of God. In truth, this 'saving' of immanence is a return to evil, though it announces itself as humanity finally at home with itself (Hegel's *zu Hause sein*), or the final liberation of creativity (Nietzsche).

Bound in a Nutshell: Bad Dreams and the King of Infinite Space

On this score, the older Hegel is much closer to the younger than appearances indicate, or common opinion grants, in claiming to rethink transcendence as other in terms of holistic immanence for which there is nothing ultimately reserved. This has been my theme throughout. In Hegel's early writings begins the counterfeiting of God. Counterfeiting may call itself reinterpretation, in terms of the demands of the time. These earlier efforts at counterfeiting (in *Early Theological Writings*) are less masked, for the difference between the original (God as transcendence itself) and the new form originated, is very evident in the hostilities directed to the former. A new image is being created in which, like the iconoclastic revolutionaries, a nose is here defaced, a statue there toppled, and all up as high as the available instruments of destruction can reach. Something of the original may be visible after the assault, but to say the result of the assault is the restoration of the pristine form of the original will be greeted with incredulity by those for whom the original communicated more truly of transcendence.

The lines of attack are more evident when the instruments of assault are more crude, and this we see with the younger Hegel. While the assault will come to seem moderated, more subtle instruments will be developed that no longer do their work by crude assault but by dialectical insinuation. The maturer Hegel became a more mature counterfeiter of God; became so, because he rightly sees more in the original that he is trying to match and double with concepts. His maturity as counterfeiter, in that regard, is *more open and true* to the original – and this is the source of the persuasion he exerts on many. Yet the *spiritual dynamic* of this more finessed openness to the original is oriented to a counterfeit goal, despite this maturing of attention. It is this, the overall spiritual dynamic that we have to keep in mind, and not just the increased power of the counterfeiter to see more and more in the original that has to be mimicked, or matched to be replaced.

One sometimes wonders if Hegel become more metaphysically superficial the more complete he became as a speculative systematizer. And there is something paradoxical here, in that the systematic consummation of a certain insight finally generates systematic blindness. I mean that Hegel's openness to the otherness of the religious served the creation of his putatively more absolute speculative concept. But just because it served that creation, we must wonder about the openness itself. The telos of the counterfeit concept means that we are driven more and more to be true to the original, even as we more and more subtly diverge from this truth. The supreme counterfeiter produces a counterfeit that not only doubles for the original, but one that looks almost exactly like or identical to it, one that can pass almost completely as the original, such that there seems no question then of an original as other. Is this not exactly what Hegel tries to do: pass the supreme counterfeit, itself passing as the original that, given the seeming success of the counterfeit, presents itself now as no counterfeit at all but the true original? But – once again – what if the dynamic of spiritual energy is not the same as the original, perhaps even counter to it? Do we not then have exactly the problem of the anti-Christ who appears the same as Christ and so can successfully pose as the true Christ? How then distinguish the true original and the counterfeit?¹⁰

Indeed the new original conjured from the prior original might even claim to be the pristine original restored to its true form, as prescribed by speculative reason. What if that is the most insidious, even seditious, insinuation? A spiritually subtle assault that masks itself as speculative comprehension? And all of this as the counterfeit becomes less and less crude? By small strokes – effected one by one and seemingly innocuous, but taken as a whole decisive – that seem to respect the original, they actually change the entire spiritual energy of it. All done by, so to say, a creeping dialectic in which every transition to the next deformation, now called fuller development, is presented as the only logical, rational successor to the previous. What is happening? We are being hypnotized slowly to accept the replacement, and to think it is the original replaced. And speculative reason is the means by which we are sent into a rational stupor in which, at the end, we are told we can now wake up to the so-called absolute conceptual superiority of so-called absolute knowing. On the heights we have fallen into a bewitchment, complete with the god that we have created for ourselves to adore, and the becalmed bewitchment feels it no longer needs to go beyond itself.

In the early writings we saw the space being shaped in which Hegel wants to think and live; but there are elemental decisions here, and exclusions in these elemental decisions. While the intellectual resources become more sophisticated, the basic elemental decisions and exclusions remain in effect, and do their work, now in silence, in subterranean ways. The space might beguile one with the promise of infinite openness, but it is like a box, and the box is the same box, no matter the fact that more is now packed into it, and indeed that many extensions are built on to it, or indeed that the box, at a certain point of intellectual sophistication, will be claimed to be a self-expanding circle and so supposedly infinite. What if it is the same box built on the same affirmations and negations, the same elemental inclusions and exclusions? It becomes more difficult to read the later Hegel because these elemental affirmations and exclusions hide themselves in the system, and hide themselves most effectively because the system overtly proclaims itself ambitious to bring *everything* significant into the light of conceptual articulation. But it is the same box.

Hamlet: 'O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams' (*Hamlet*, II, ii, 258–60). The philosopher in the box might think himself the king of infinite space, but bounded by a nutshell, can he escape bad dreams? 'Denmark's a prison' – and perhaps not only Denmark. Such dreams remind us, at the end, of Kant whose template of autonomous reason, at the beginning, did so much to determine the shapes in which his idealistic successors found a way of more and more thoroughly writing off divine transcendence as other. Hegel's spirit expands the box of Kantian reason. If Kant sought a religion within the bounds of reason alone, Hegel entirely agrees, except he also says reason has no bounds, and hence can take *within itself everything*, including religion. He does not betray the project of bringing religion within the bounds of reason, but by expanding reason, while claiming to complete Kant, he ends up with a more radical rationalization of religion: there is no other to reason, there is no beyond, there is no transcendence. Hegelian spirit consummates this more holistic reason. As he puts it in the *Phenomenology* (*PhG*, 178, *PS* § 235): 'Reason is the certainty of being all reality' (*Die Vernunft ist die Gewissheit, alle*

Realität zu sein). Spirit embodies the full self-conscious concreteness of this certainty of 'being all reality'.

What then if we are still self-bounding in a nutshell, though counting ourselves kings of infinite space? Kant, in his moralistic way, knew now and then that he was the inmate of a box, and even though he tried to make his peace with it, he could not. Hegel systematically justifies the imprisonment as self-determining immanence. Hegel's speculative holism conjures up a self-expanding, self-completing box, and hence rather than opening us to the space of the infinite, imprisons us more effectively, for we now think we are free. After all the speculative system shows that this is so, this must be so. Kierkegaard's protest is one of the many bad dreams that Hegel's religious successors had, bad dreams that made them start awake, fitful and as if in a metaphysical fever, perplexed and rightly rebellious about the wretchedness of the claimed completion. I often wonder if we have not woken yet, though we have denied Hegel, or rebelled, times out of number.

Notes

- 1 Kierkegaard (1992), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 306–7.
- 2 Hegel speaks of a dialectic of universal, particular and individual; and the last is the concrete universal. This is not the singular as I mean it. For there is no concrete universal short of the absolutely self-mediating whole in Hegel; hence finite individuals, though we might call them singulars, are not fully individual, since particularity and universality never coincide, never are one, short of the absolute whole; and so singulars as finite events are to be dialectically *aufgehoben* in more inclusive wholes, all the way to the absolute whole, which is the true union of universal and particular, since the particularity is the self-particularization of the universal, and hence the only individual is the absolute whole. This is the same logic, dialectically qualified, as is present in Spinoza in his definition of substance as what must be conceived in and through itself alone. The Hegelian absolute is also defined through itself alone, for the other is its own otherness, hence itself, and hence the circle closes into the absolute one. See note 15, chapter 3 above on Spinoza and God/Nature as the one Individual.
- 3 Among recent commentators I think Houlgate (1991) has been one of the best in trying to turn Hegel in this direction. Houlgate takes Hegel's religious views with seriousness.
- 4 See Desmond (2001a), 282 ff. on this, and Desmond (2002).
- 5 The depths of human singularity make us ask about the analogous character of the other to whom one is given over. Indeed surrender to the impersonal could be supplemented by, say, Nietzsche's view of the other as will to power: *Amor fati* as surrender to the ultimate ring of will to power in eternal becoming. I call Nietzsche to mind because he was very well aware of the claim of singularity, too aware some think. Yet he too will give himself over. Is the will to power what answers to singularity? Is there a disjunction that is bridged by a violence to human singularity? Is 'God' will to power? Or – and this is not the same question – is will to power 'God'? And notice that the other to which one surrenders could also be Hegelian *Geist*, obviously not the same as will to power.
- 6 Hegel *GW*, 21, 124; *SL* 137. See also *Enz*, § 94, *Zus*, where he speaks against the 'bad infinity' of the 'ought-to-be' and says: 'But such a progression to infinity is not the real infinite. That consists in being at home with itself, or, if enunciated as a process, in coming to itself in its other'. And again § 95: '... something in its passage into other only joins with itself. To be thus self-related in the passage, and in the other, is the

genuine infinity'. That Hegel's infinite is self-relating is underscored by the fact that the next category with which he deals is 'being-for-self' (*Fürsichsein*).

- 7 I distinguish, Desmond (1987), infinite succession, intentional infinitude, and actual infinitude. The first is more like Hegel's 'bad infinity', but 'intentional infinitude' may be the 'intention' of the infinite, an 'intention' never fully lucid to itself, but it is not the infinite, and as a consequence of the fact that this difference is constitutive, I find it impossible to use 'actual infinitude' in the way Hegel does.
- 8 Perhaps the seeds of the atheistic gods we find in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and in the legacy of a coarsened dialectic such as we find with Feuerbach and Marx, might be said to have been sown in what Kant calls the 'transcendental subreption' in *Critique of Pure Reason* with respect to transcendental illusion; 'subreption' is the word also used with respect to the sublime in *Critique of Judgment*; but its logic simulates what I call a dialectical self-mediation in and through an other that is no other finally. Such 'subreption' allows the reduction of the hypostatized (Kant's word in *Critique of Pure Reason*) other to the self that has hypostatized. What Kant means by transcendental subreption contains the gene of later mutant dialectics that are more reductive, more negative and more unruly.
- 9 Defenders of Hegel might claim that Hegel's speculative *Vernunft* has nothing to do with instrumental reason, but the matter is not so simple. So my remarks in 'Gothic Hegel' (Desmond, 1999d) where I argue that Hegel was asleep to the monstrous powers incubated in instrumental reason in modernity, and this despite the fact that his version of speculative *Vernunft* is *not* defined as instrumental reason. Yet, both instrumental and speculative reason are each a form of self-mediating reason: the first more explicitly instrumentalizes what is other to itself as a means, or medium of its own self-mediation; the second claims to be beyond instrumentalization, but the other is also always its own other, and this other too is the medium of its own self-completing self-mediation. They lie on the same continuum, relative to self-mediation in and through their own(ed) others, and relative to the perils of the monstrousness of immanent reason itself, that is, its self-production as a counterfeit double of God.
- 10 This is also a problem with Nietzsche who is far more overt and in that sense more honest. Hegel was to Nietzsche somewhat as Soloviev was to Shestov. On this, see Desmond (2000d). This entire article is relevant to the issue of the anti-Christ and the counterfeit double, as well as to the question of God as beyond the whole.

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Hegel's God

A Counterfeit Double?

WILLIAM DESMOND

Hegel is widely regarded as one of the major thinkers of the modern era, if not the entire tradition of philosophy. Hegel, like many philosophers, took seriously traditional philosophical perplexities about God, but unlike many modern philosophers he claimed to take the specific characteristic of Christianity into account in his philosophizing.

This book presents a new examination, interpretation and critical engagement with Hegel's philosophy of religion, and with his concept of God in particular. William Desmond explores the distinctive stresses of Hegel's approach to God, the influence it has exerted, and the fundamental problems that his approach exhibits.

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Merold Westphal, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy,
Fordham University, USA

Hegel's God represents a major critical engagement with the religious thought of Hegel by one of the most expansive and penetrating philosophers of our time. Showing knowledge of the entire span of Hegel's writings, subtlety in interpretation, lucidity, economy and elegance in writing, and real appreciation of how and why Hegel adapted and corrected the Christian view of God and his relation to the world, humanity, and history, this book in the end refuses to baptize Hegel. A beautifully realized and mature reading of Hegel, Hegel's God is at the same time a probing and constructive text in the philosophy of religion.

Cyril O'Regan, Huisking Professor in Theology,
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